

Tortoises in the Mist: Turtle Poetry for Conservationists



*Edited by
Anders G.J. Rhodin and Eric V. Goode*

*Foreword by Russell A. Mittermeier
Preface by Julian Sands*

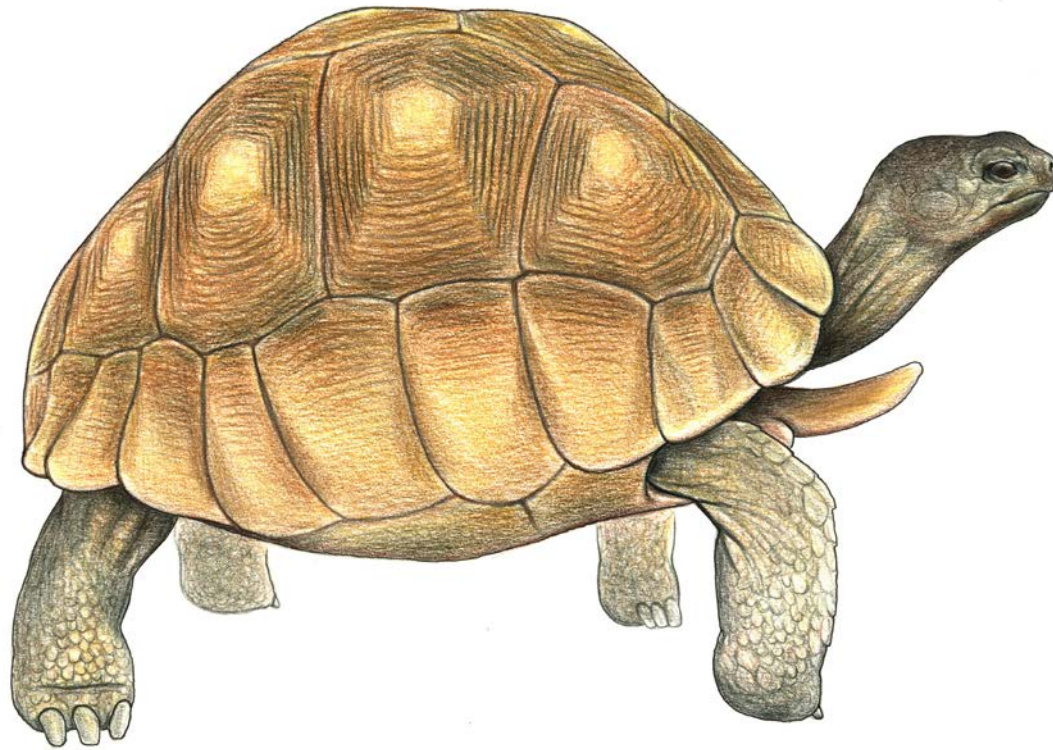
*Published by
Chelonian Research Foundation and Turtle Conservancy*



Front Cover: Giant Galápagos Tortoises, *Chelonoidis vandenburghi*, in the wild in the mist on the caldera rim on top of Volcán Alcedo, Isabela, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador. Photo by Peter C.H. Pritchard, *Chelonian Research Institute*.

Back Cover: Male Plowshare Tortoise or Angonoka, *Astrochelys yniphora*, in the wild in Baly Bay National Park, northwestern Madagascar. Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Tortoises in the Mist:
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Male Plowshare Tortoise or Angonoka, *Astrochelys yniphora*, from northern Madagascar.
Drawing by Stephen D. Nash.

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Arlington, Vermont and Ojai, California*

2021



Images © Touchstone Pictures.

“No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world. ... We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion.

Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for.

To quote from Whitman:

‘O me, o life of the questions of these recurring, of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities filled with the foolish. What good amid these, o me, o life? Answer: that you are here. That life exists, and identity. That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.’

That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?”

Robin Williams, 1989
as John Keating in *Dead Poets Society*

“I *like* turtles –
both the cute ones
and the ugly ones...”

Harrison Ford, 2011
at Board Meeting of *Conservation International*

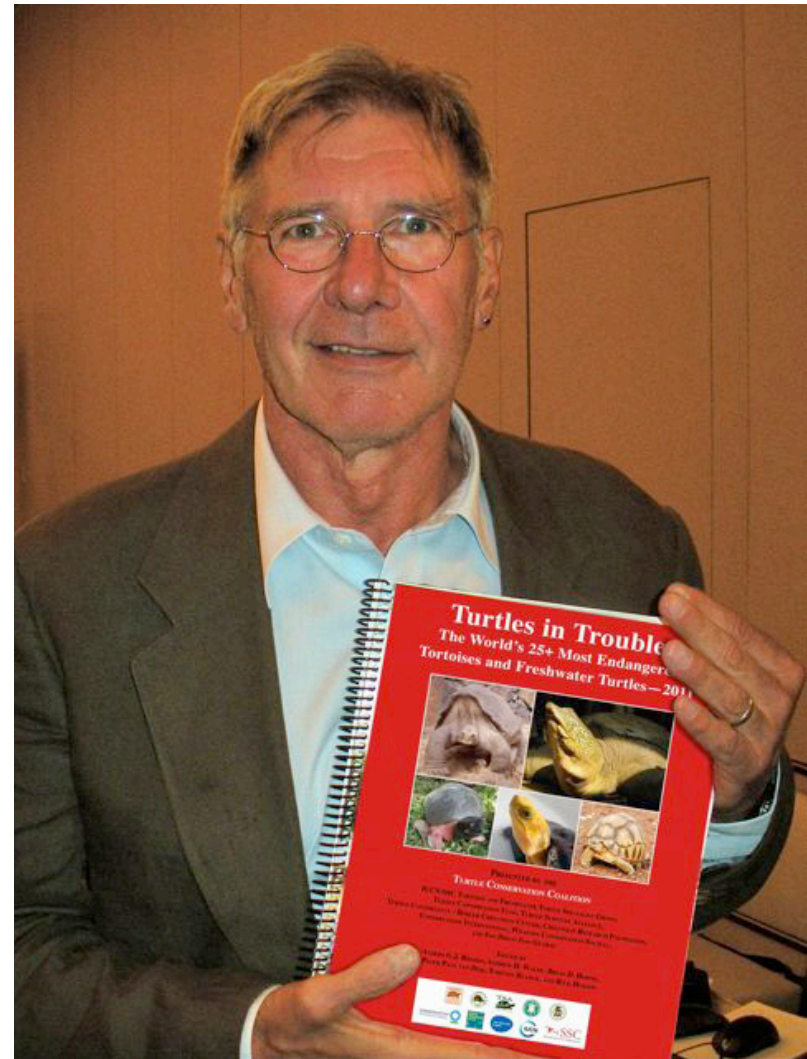


Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin.



Adult male Burmese Roofed Turtle, *Batagur trivittata*, in breeding color, from the Chindwin River, Myanmar.

This species is Critically Endangered, with less than a few hundred animals left in the wild—
a captive breeding program is now beginning to restore its numbers.

Photo by Rick Hudson, *Turtle Survival Alliance*.

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Adult male Cochin Forest Cane Turtle, *Vijayachelys silvatica*, from the rainforests of Anamalais, Tamil Nadu, Western Ghats, southwestern India.

Photo by Veerappan Deepak.

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Male Plowshare Tortoise or Angonoka, *Astrochelys yniphora*, in the wild in Baly Bay National Park, northern Madagascar—this species has been reduced to only a few hundred individuals left in the wild in one small area, where they are threatened by continued illegal poaching for the high-end international pet trade.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Foreword

After all is said and done, this is still the only planet where we know with certainty that life exists. Earth's magnificent and seemingly endless array of life forms is truly unique and it is unlikely ever to be replicated anywhere else in the universe—even if at some distant point in the future we find another planet with living creatures of some kind. Sadly, our planet's biodiversity, as represented by at least 2 million species (and perhaps much more) and the vast diversity of ecosystems and interdependent webs of life which come together to create them are at great risk. As has been pointed out many times, we are facing (or already in—depending on your perspective) an extinction crisis, the likes of which we haven't seen since the cosmic event that extinguished the dinosaurs and many other life forms 65 million years ago. Action is needed on many different fronts to ensure that Earth's biodiversity survives intact, that we prevent the loss of species, and that we fully recognize that conserving life on Earth is also in our own best interests as a human species.

Among the many actions needed are the creation and more effective management of protected areas and indigenous lands—the true front line in biodiversity conservation, assurance colonies in captivity for those species that are on the brink of extinction in the wild, development and implementation of more effective governmental policies at national, regional, and global levels, development of economic incentives for conservation of species and their needed habitats, and recognition of the fundamental importance of nature-based solutions to climate change, the overarching environmental issue that is finally attracting global attention. But we also need ever greater appreciation of the cultural, moral, and spiritual reasons for conserving biodiversity. There is not a single culture on Earth that doesn't have a strong linkage to nature and species of many different kinds, and very often there is a strong moral and spiritual connection as well. This is often overlooked in the drive to come up with economic models of sustainable development, but it is an essential component of what is needed to accomplish our goals and ensure that we leave an intact and liveable planet to future generations.

Many groups of species are in deep trouble, some more than others. But the two larger taxonomic groups of vertebrates that have the highest percentages of Threatened species (IUCN Red List categories of Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable) are the Order Testudines—turtles and tortoises—and the Order Primates. Both come in at more than 60% Threatened, and both include species that are literally on the verge of extinction, with turtles and tortoises already having lost several species in modern times. Both groups have attracted a lot of focused attention and have action plans and funding mechanisms in place—albeit nowhere near what is needed for long-term success, and both have reasonably high levels of global popularity—although, once again, nowhere near what is needed. We have to employ every mechanism possible to increase their popularity and visibility—from species-based ecotourism to creation of more protected areas to large scale use of social media, and even to demonstrate that they play a key role in maintaining habitats and combatting climate change. But more than anything else we need to truly love these species, and to develop and encourage ever stronger constituencies to work on their behalf into the future.

In this delightful collection of poems, my very good lifelong friend Dr. Anders Rhodin expresses his deep love for and commitment to turtles in a way that very few ever have. I first met Anders 51 years ago when we were both undergraduates at Dartmouth College in New



Adult Spider Tortoise, *Pyxis arachnoides*, in the wild in the Berenty Reserve, southern Madagascar.
Photo by Russell A. Mittermeier, *Re:wild*.

Hampshire. Unlike many of us in the conservation business, Anders did not grow up loving turtles. But there was in him a deep core of what Edward O. Wilson calls Biophilia, and that came to the fore during his last couple of years at Dartmouth. We lived opposite each other on the same dorm floor in our last three years there, and began to talk a lot about conservation and adventure travel, something which was already an essential ingredient of my life. And, just by chance, Anders acquired from one of our ecology classes a couple of hatchling red-eared slider turtles. He initially didn't even know what they were, but we talked about them and I began to share my knowledge of and passion for turtles, which had fascinated me since early childhood. Anders began to get hooked, but it took a joint expedition to South America following our graduation in 1971 to fully convert him. During a short trip up the Rio Cuieras, a tributary of the Rio Negro north of Manaus, Anders acquired a juvenile yellow-footed tortoise, which he named "Jabuti" (the Amazonian word for tortoise). He truly fell in love with this tortoise and brought it back with him to the U.S. (and then to Sweden) as a symbol and object of his new passion.

Although Anders chose to enter the medical profession, becoming a highly regarded orthopedic surgeon, he also began to work on turtles as well—little by little developing two parallel professions. His early experiences with me in the Amazon opened him up to turtle taxonomy and he and I began to collaborate scientifically at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, where I was pursuing graduate work in Antropology and Anders secured a position working in the Herpetology Department under Ernest E. Williams in his spare time while attending medical school. This led to us describing several new species of turtles together. Over the years, he gradually became one of the leading turtle experts in the world, in the process generating a wide variety of scientific publications and conservation efforts on their behalf, especially during his period as Co-Chair and Chair of the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (2000–2012). At this point in time, as a turtle expert myself, I think it is fair to say that Anders knows at least as much about turtles and tortoises as anyone else in the world, and that knowledge continues to grow.

Working on turtles full-time, while also having a highly demanding career in medicine, would simply have been impossible if Anders didn't have a deep commitment and unbelievable passion for turtles. This is what drives him every day of his life and I am sure will continue to do so for a long time to come. In this unique book, published in collaboration with another totally committed turtle lover, Eric Goode, founder and inspirational leader of the Turtle Conservancy, we have an amazing manifestation of Anders' love for turtles and his passionate advocacy for their preservation and protection. I for one find it truly inspirational and very special; I hope that you, the reader, will feel that same way, and that you will thoroughly enjoy the emotions and passions for turtles conveyed in the pages of this wonderful collection of turtle poetry.

Russell A. Mittermeier

*Chief Conservation Officer, Re:wild
Past President, Conservation International
Board Member, Turtle Conservancy and
Chelonian Research Foundation*



Llanos Sideneck Turtle, *Podocnemis vogli*, in the wild in the Rio Orinoco drainage basin, southwestern Venezuela.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Preface

One of the great pleasures and privileges in my life is the daily encounter, when at home, with a gamboling herd of adopted Chelonians—friends who have settled happily on my south-facing apron of hillside in the Hollywood Hills. I call them friends because their presence is so life-affirming, inspiring, and comforting—the embodiments of friendship—but I do not think of them as pets, they are not named and seldom handled...just cohabitants with whom I share a particular microclimate, vegetation, and *terroir*. Though these creatures are essentially in a captive environment, I try and simulate the wild as best I can, though nothing can compare to a true natural expanse of tortoise-roamed land. I cannot imagine a world in which they are not free-roaming and grazing beyond our preserves, even though science and common-sense tell us it is a dreadful possibility. So, no better time to celebrate them, in all their glorious diversity. Their appearance and personalities are highly individual in spite of superficial similarity. They represent so much that Humans might aspire to: a quiet stillness, an existence where breathing, eating, and shelter are all that is required for a peaceful and content existence—what might be called *well-being*. They do not plunder Earth’s resources and habitat...they are not driven by material consumption, both the scourge of their survival, as observed by Pliny the Elder almost two thousand years ago in his *Natural History*. In the early nineteenth century, when Shelley wrote “And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind’s imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?” he might have been contemplating the Tortoise. Likewise Keats, in the quiet bowers of *Endymion*, “Full of...health, and quiet breathing” and again in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, “Thou foster-child of silence and slow time.” Mantras indeed on how to live!

Poetry shares and suggests feelings and experiences beyond the ordered thought of regulated prose. As the poet Richard Kenney says, “Poetry, I think, is the distant-thunder sound in the drying ink.” In *Tortoises in the Mist*, Anders Rhodin so beautifully evokes their glorious purpose...“ponderous steps, gentle grace.” Grace McLaughlin, in *Ancient Ones*, writes “From your burrows, You watch”...what a celebration of their sentinel presence! Anders’ *Culebra Leatherbacks* reminds us of our urgent responsibility, speaking of turtles “held in our hands to cherish and care”...a clarion call to all who understand the importance of the mission of the Turtle Conservancy.

How wonderful that we now have this anthology of Tortoise and Turtle poetry to share, dedicated to these most humbling and uplifting of beings, sensitively illustrated by Stephen Nash, and with intimate photographs by Peter Pritchard, Russell Mittermeier, Peter Paul van Dijk, Eric Goode, Anders, and many others, all most nobly edited by Anders and Eric, who have long and tirelessly been Standard Bearers on behalf these enthralling, life-enhancing, wondrous creatures.

Enjoy!

Julian Sands

Actor

Board Member, Turtle Conservancy



Adult Radiated Tortoise, *Astrochelys radiata*, in the wild in the Cap Sainte Marie Special Reserve, southern Madagascar, the species' last stronghold against ever-increasing overexploitation for the regional consumption and international pet trades.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Introduction

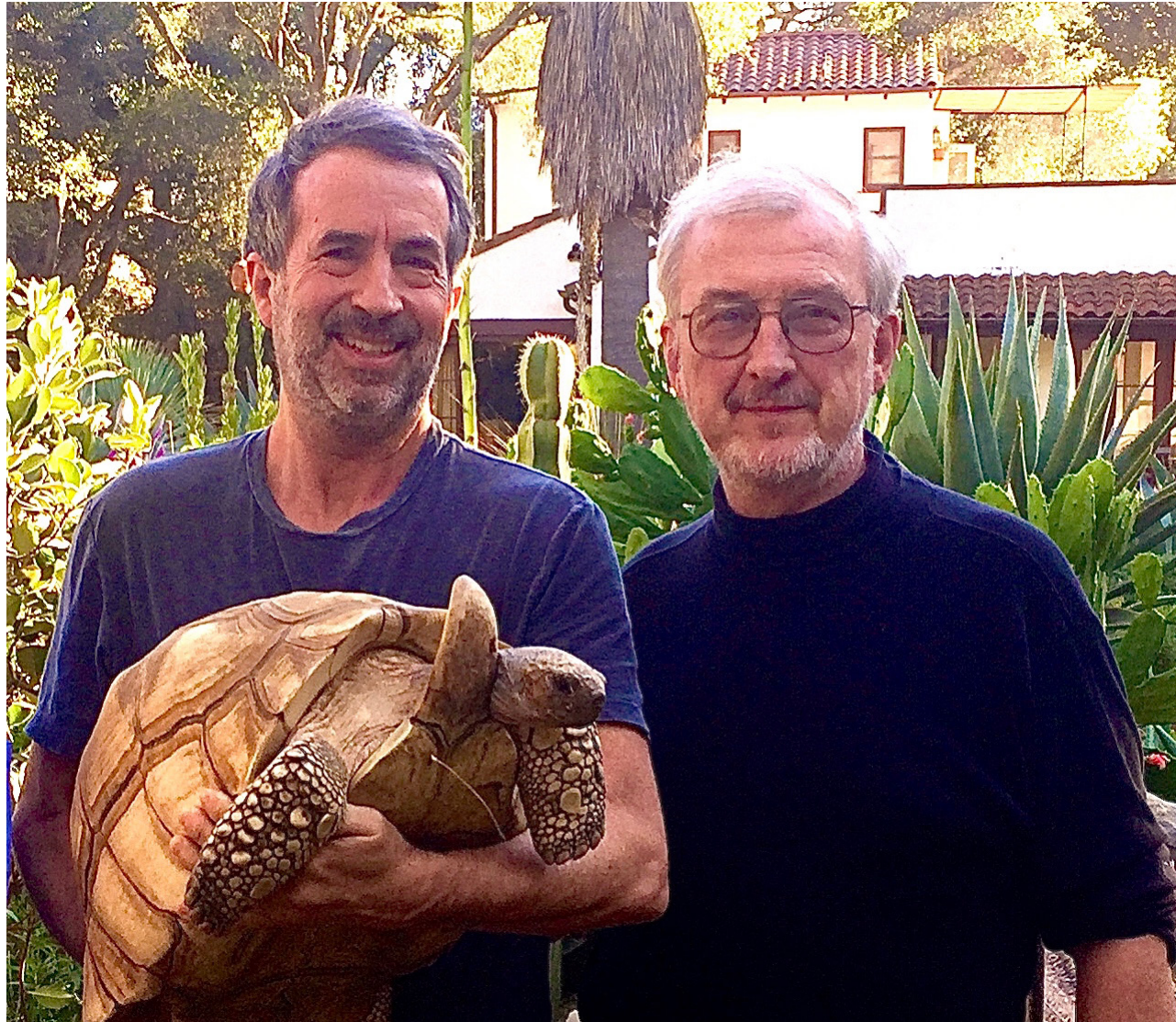
Over the years, *Chelonian Research Foundation* has been collecting and publishing turtle poetry. We started it in 1996 as a regular feature in our scientific journal, *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, and have also published turtle poetry in our books, *Chelonian Research Monographs*. Originally inspired by Anders Rhodin's then-life partner (now wife), healthcare and nursing executive Carol A. Conroy (former Chief Nursing Officer and Vice President of *Southwestern Vermont Medical Center* and Founder of *Healthcare Excellence Unlimited*), and Wallace J. Nichols (co-founder of *OceanRevolution.org* and the *Blue Mind Collective*), Anders has since then been selecting poems to publish. The feature has become a popular mainstay of our publications, mixing a small dose of poetic humanity with chelonian science and conservation. The *Turtle Conservancy* became a co-publisher in 2017 and Eric Goode has joined our effort of promoting the passion of turtle poetry with the beauty and appeal of great turtle photos.

Our desire is to share the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song or poetic prose. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish reflect that complexity, from those of pure admiration for the animals themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles. Some poems reflect our use of the turtle for consumption, others stress our need to preserve and protect turtles. Some deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all may hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in our hearts.

Since the turtle poems we have published to date are somewhat scattered and perhaps a little difficult to access, we have chosen to bring many of them together here to make enjoying them easier. We also add some new poems that we have not previously published in our journals. By working together and editing this volume in conjunction with Eric and the *Turtle Conservancy*, and adding their artistic style and flare for reaching out visually with beautiful photographs and compelling drawings, as presented so well in their signature publication, *The Tortoise*, we hope to enhance and broaden the appeal of this poetry collection. What could be better than poets and artists and scientists and conservationists working passionately together for turtle conservation?

We hope that this volume will raise awareness and concern for the perilous plight of turtles and tortoises—they are among the most threatened large groups of vertebrate animals on earth, with over half of their nearly 400 species facing the threat of extinction. Overwhelmingly threatened by overexploitation for consumption of meat, eggs, and body parts, as well as extensive habitat loss and rampant illegal international wildlife trade, turtles and tortoises are facing a survival crisis of unprecedented proportions.

We also hope that this mix of turtle poetry and visual arts will inspire all turtle lovers and conservationists as much as it has inspired and moved both of us, and that our *community of concerned chelonian conservationists* will grow as a result and increasingly engage in the global struggle to preserve these charismatic species—these precious jewels of evolution. We ask for your support in this ongoing quest.



Eric Goode (*left*) and Anders Rhodin (*right*) with a Madagascan Plowshare Tortoise (*Astrochelys yniphora*) at the Behler Chelonian Conservation Center, *Turtle Conservancy*, Ojai, California.

Photo by Peter Paul van Dijk, *Re:wild*.

Acknowledgments. — We thank all the photographers who contributed photographs or drawings either to this volume or to *Chelonian Research Foundation* to use in earlier issues of either *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* or *Chelonian Research Monographs*, or to *Turtle Conservancy* to use either in this volume or in earlier issues of *The Tortoise*: Matthew Aresco, Albert Bertolero, Roger Bour, Veerappan Deepak, Tomas Diagne, Scott Eckert, Marilyn Goode, Carol Dorff Hall, Rick Hudson, John B. Iverson, Gerald Kuchling, Kevin Main, Guy Marcovaldi, Tim McCormack, Cristina Mittermeier, Russell A. Mittermeier, Stephen D. Nash, Mathieu Ouelette, Frank V. Paladino, Peter C.H. Pritchard, Bev Steveson, and Peter Paul van Dijk.

We also thank all those people who either submitted their own turtle poems to our endeavors, or provided us with commentaries about their poems while granting permission for us to either publish or reprint them: J. Thomas Brown, Lisa Campbell, Michael Christensen, Taylor Edwards, C.B. Follett, Robert S. Foote, Joseph W. Gastinger, Matthew Godfrey, Marian L. Griffey, Charles Levenstein, Donald Levering, Grace S. McLaughlin, Michael H.J. Rhodin, Raymond A. Saumure, Mark Summers, and Patricia B. Walters. Additionally, we thank those people who submitted other people's poems or writings to us that we published: Harold Avery, John L. Behler, Carol A. Conroy, Brian D. Horne, Martin A. Larson, Thomas E.J. Leuteritz, Wallace J. Nichols, Peter C.H. Pritchard, and Lora L. Smith.

We thank our close friend and colleague, Russell A. Mittermeier of *Re:wild* (formerly *Global Wildlife Conservation*) and the *Turtle Conservancy* and *Chelonian Research Foundation* Boards, for his long-term friendship and support and for writing the Foreword. We also thank Julian Sands, actor and friend and *Turtle Conservancy* Board member, for writing the Preface.

We are also most grateful and appreciative of the support of the other members (past and present) of the Board of Directors of *Turtle Conservancy*: Allison Alberts, Martin Dieck, Matt Frankel, Cullen Geiselman, Gregory George, John Mitchell, Russ Mittermeier, Sibille Hart Pritchard, Rick Ridgeway, Maurice Rodrigues, Andy Sabin, Julian Sands, Craig Stanford, Brett Stearns, Fisher Stevens, and Michael Zilkha. We also thank the other members of the Executive Board of *Chelonian Research Foundation* for their long-standing support: Carol Conroy, Matt Frankel, Russ Mittermeier, Michael Rhodin, and Peter Paul van Dijk.

Lastly, Anders thanks his life partner and wife, Carol Conroy, for her sustaining love and support and understanding of the depth of his passion for all things turtle, especially poetry, taxonomy, and conservation, and Eric thanks his parents, Marilyn and Fredrick Goode, for imparting their deep and abiding love of poetry to him and their unfailing support for all his endeavors in the worlds of art, hospitality, and turtle conservation. We are both forever grateful for these, our muses.



Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chairman of the Board, Turtle Conservancy*
Founder and Director, Chelonian Research Foundation

Eric V. Goode, *Co-Founder and President/CEO, Turtle Conservancy*



Ancient Galápagos Tortoise, *Chelonoidis duncanensis*, over 100 years old,
in the wild on Pinzón (Duncan Island), facing an uncertain future.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Ancient Chelonians

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*Ancient chelonians of lineage primeval
Their survival now threatened by man's upheaval*

*We gather together to celebrate our perception
Of turtles and their need for preservation and protection*

*For turtles forever to play their part ecological
To prosper and maintain their diversity biological*

*For turtle and tortoise, terrapin and kin
Their kind to preserve, their future to win*

*We must work together, I tell you from the heart
Whether we work together, or apart.*

Comment (1999). – I wrote this poem for my opening address at the *Powdermill Conference on Freshwater Turtle Biology and Conservation* in Laughlin, Nevada, in August 1999. Honoring the style of Robert Frost's *The Tuft of Flowers*, I tried to capture the essence of how we must all work together to help save these chelonians that we care for with such passion. I read the poem again during my closing address at the *Florida Conference on Freshwater Turtles* in St. Petersburg, Florida, in October 1999. At each reading I sensed from the positive responses of listeners that there is a need for all of us in the conservation world to not only expound on our scientific knowledge, but also to openly express our passion and love for turtles. In expressing that passion, by whatever reasonable means possible, we may reach beyond our tight-knit scientific chelonian circles to start influencing, at least on an emotional level, those unconverted people with whom we must interact if we are to succeed in preserving the turtles of the world. We must all be ambassadors for turtle conservation at all levels of human interaction.

Comment (2013). – As I finished formatting and editing and putting the final touches on the monograph on *Turtles on the Brink in Madagascar*, I felt that I wanted to once again express my feelings about how important it is for all of us who love turtles to work together for their preservation and protection. By working together—among individuals, organizations, and institutions—and by demonstrating and sharing the passion that we all have for these endeavors and their importance, we are more likely to ultimately be successful, and to gradually build a collaborative and increasingly influential broadbased coalition of like-minded people and organizations and governments that share our vision of a world that values biodiversity and ecosystem services and the sustainable wealth of a healthy and richly diverse natural environment. The critically endangered turtles and tortoises of Madagascar are an integral and important part of that environment—indeed, they are radiant jewels in its crown—and more than worthy and in desperate need of our utmost efforts to secure their future. I believe it is our moral imperative to work for the conservation of these amazing species.



Giant Galápagos Tortoises, *Chelonoidis vandenburghi*, in the mist on Volcan Alcedo, in the wild, as they should be, and as they should be protected, enjoyed, and celebrated by all of us and our children's children into a long and secure future.

Photo by Peter C.H. Pritchard, *Chelonian Research Institute*.

Tortoises in the Mist

Anders G. J. Rhodin

*Tortoises in the mist
timeless creatures, moisture-kissed
neath shrouded trees and mossy lace
since eons past, still exist.*

*On crater rim, a magic place
tortoises move, at their pace
from caldera floor below
ponderous steps, gentle grace.*

*Ringed by fire, lava flows
spared the whalers' deadly blows
survive serene, Alcedo home
enchanted isles, Galápagos.*

Comment (1996). – Tortoises in the mist on the crater rim above the caldera of Volcan Alcedo, Albemarle Island (Isabela), July 1986. During dry periods tortoises migrate from the dry caldera floor up to the crater rim where the mist (*garua*) of the cloud-catchment drip zone provides them the moisture they need.



Male Eastern Box Turtle, *Terrapene carolina carolina*, foraging in the wild in Virginia, USA, once very common, now increasingly threatened by habitat loss, road mortality, and collection for the pet trade.

Photo by Peter Paul van Dijk, *Re:wild*.

To a Box Turtle

John Updike

*Size of a small skull, and like a skull segmented,
of pentagons healed and varnished to form a dome,
you almost went unnoticed in the meadow,
among its tall grasses and serrated strawberry leaves
your mottle of amber and umber effective camouflage.*

*You were making your way through grave distances,
your forefeet just barely extended and as dainty as dried
coelacanth fins, as miniature sea-fans, your black nails
decadent like a Chinese empress's, and your head
a triangular snake-head, eyes ringed with dull gold.*

*I pick you up. Your imperious head withdraws.
Your bottom plate, hinged once, presents a No
with its courteous waxed surface, a marquetry
of inlaid squares, fine-grained and tinted
tobacco-brown and the yellow of a pipe smoker's teeth.*

*What are you thinking, thus sealed inside yourself?
My hand must have a smell, a killer's warmth.
It holds you upside down, aloft, undignified,
your leathery person amazed in the floating dark.
How much pure fear can your wrinkled brain contain?*

*I put you down. Your tentative, stalk-bending walk
resumes. The manifold jewel of you melts into grass.
Power mowers have been cruel to your race, and creatures
less ornate and unlikely have long gone extinct;
but nature's tumults pool to form a giant peace.*

Comment (1996). – This poem, written by John Updike while living in Massachusetts, USA, appears to describe the common eastern box turtle, *Terrapene carolina carolina*. This represents the extreme northeastern range limit for the species and subspecies.

Comment (2020). – This was the first poem we published in any of our turtle publications, in the first issue of our second volume of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*. It started the tradition, continued through today, of publishing turtle poetry alongside turtle science, of presenting poetry hand-in-hand with biology.

1996. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 2(1):121.
Composed 23 May 1989, published in: Updike, John. 1993. *Collected Poems 1953–1993*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., pp. 226–227.
Copyright © 1993 by John Updike. Submitted by Wallace J. Nichols.



Turtle dealer in a market in Hong Kong in the late 1970s offering live Asian box turtles (genus *Cuora*) for sale for food or Traditional Chinese Medicine, holding up an adult Yellow-margined Box Turtle (*Cuora flavomarginata*), with many Chinese Three-striped Box Turtles, “Golden Coin Turtles” (*Cuora trifasciata*), in cages at his feet.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Turtle Soup

Marilyn Chin

*You go home one evening tired from work,
and your mother boils you turtle soup.
Twelve hours hunched over the hearth
(who knows what else is in that cauldron).*

*You say, "Ma, you've poached the symbol of long life;
that turtle lived four thousand years, swam
the Wei, up the Yellow, over the Yangtze.
Witnessed the Bronze Age, the High Tang,
grazed on splendid sericulture."
(So, she boils the life out of him.)*

*"All our ancestors have been fools.
Remember Uncle Wu who rode ten thousand miles
to kill a famous Manchu and ended up
with his head on a pole? Eat, child,
its liver will make you strong."*

*"Sometimes you're the life, sometimes the sacrifice."
Her sobbing is inconsolable.
So, you spread that gentle napkin
over your lap in decorous Pasadena.*

*Baby, some high priestess has got it wrong.
The golden decal on the green underbelly
says "Made in Hong Kong."*

*Is there nothing left but the shell
and humanity's strange inscriptions,
the songs, the rites, the oracles?*

Comment (1998). – This poem about turtle soup reflects the ancient Chinese tradition of eating turtles as interpreted by a first-generation Chinese-American poet (born in Hong Kong and raised in western USA) who tries to remind her mother of what should still be sacred from the old country. For the poet, the turtle represents a revered Chinese mythological symbol—a symbol of longevity, patience, grandeur, and antiquity—but the irony is that it ends up in a swirling soup far from its ancestral home, poached by her mother, who has no interest in the turtle as a cultural symbol, only as a consumable resource (Chin in Moyers, 1995). If we are to protect and save our world's dwindling populations of turtles, especially those in China where they are being unsustainably overexploited and consumed, then we need to recapture some of the ancient reverence once held for these unique and marvelous creatures. If not, we may lose those populations forever and be left alone at last to ask Marilyn Chin's haunting question: "Is there nothing left but the shell?"

1998. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 3(1):146.
Published in: Chin, Marilyn. 1993. *The Phoenix Gone, The Terrace Empty*. Milkweed Editions.
Reprinted from: Moyers, Bill. 1995. *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets*. New York: Doubleday, pp. 75–76.
Copyright © 1993 by Marilyn Chin. Submitted by Carol A. Conroy.



Female Blanding's Turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*, on a nesting foray in the wild in east-central Minnesota, USA.
Photo by Carol Dorff Hall.

Tragedy of the Road

Don Blanding

*I pulled my car aside today, to watch a trailer pass,
The neatest little trailer job, compact in line and mass,
Without an inch of wasted space within its nifty frame.
It had no car to pull it but it got there just the same.
So perfectly designed it was, to fit the driver's need,
It didn't lack a single thing except it hadn't speed.*

*The driver was an awful dub, he didn't seem to know
The traffic rules or when to stop or where he ought to go.
He went right through a Stop-sign on the wrong side of the road.
He didn't see the great big truck with overburdened load
Come whamming down the highway like a fearful juggernaut.
He heard the roar but not in time to keep from getting caught.*

.

*These dotted lines are kinder than some vivid words to show
What happened to the trailer, compact and neat . . . but slow.
Some mangled flesh, some bits of shell were wreckage to explain
Why this dusty little turtle will not cross a road again.*

Comment (2000). – For this special focus issue I had hoped to find a poem on the subject of Blanding's Turtles, but searched in vain. Instead, by good fortune, I came across this light little piece authored by Don Blanding in 1946. One wonders whether this modern nature observer might not be a relative or direct descendant of William Blanding, the original collector and first observer of Blanding's Turtle back in 1838. What better way, perhaps, to honor the turtle than to present a poem by a bearer of the patronym's name. The temporal continuity from one Blanding in 1838 to another in 1946 brings a certain sense of circularity to man's observations of turtles over time. Our observations of turtles lead to an ever-increasing body of knowledge, concern, passion, and hope for the future, as those observations lead to levels of knowledge on several planes, both scientific and personal, tied together into the fabric of human chelonian experience.



Female Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, returning to the ocean after nesting in the wild on Playa Grande, Las Baulas de Guanacaste National Park, Costa Rica.

Photo by Frank V. Paladino.

A Need

Donald Levering

*From the dark waters she emerges
at night heavy with eggs*

Breathing hard,
*she drags her seven hundred pounds
up the beach
flippers churning the sand
inching her way uphill*

* * *

*We who witness
her massive apparition of the deep come to land
her dogged struggle her need
stand amidst a hatchery of stars
each blip an egg of possibility
borne of nuclear fire storms
red dwarf spiral nebulae
white giant asteroid gassy planet
or by remote chances
carbon*

* * *

*A wide track of darkened sand leads to the zenith of her climb
where she digs her body pit
flailing sand in all directions
to disguise the site of her nesting chamber
which she now scoops out with her back flippers*

*precise flippersful of wet sand lifted and placed to the side
of the meter deep chamber*

where the future of her species will incubate

* * *

*Might this be the last beach
where this ancient turtle lays her eggs?
Will she who cannot live in captivity,
she who has survived
earthquakes and tsunamis,
meteorites and ice ages,
be extinguished by the big-brained ape
stealing her eggs
drowning her in fishing nets
turning her dark nesting beaches
into bright playgrounds
frightening her back to sea*

* * *

*There is a need to maintain dark beaches
of imagination
to harbor dark pits of potential*

*A need to know that somewhere in the Gulf of Papagayo
or the deep Pacific,
in the Atlantic or Indian oceans
large reptiles are swimming
feeding mating migrating*

*A need to believe that generations hence
leatherbacks will still be grazing on jellyfish
that the largest sea turtle in the world
rife with eggs
will still be swimming toward dark beaches*

* * *

*Which of the eighty-one eggs
she has just laid in the chamber
will hatch?
Which hatchlings will escape
raccoons crabs gulls dogs humans
and skitter into the sea?*

*The mother covers up the answers
and, wheeling her enormous bulk
back toward the dark water,
she edges down the slope
into the intertidal zone
finally reaching wet sand
where she rests
waiting for a wave to lift her
and then pushes on deeper
afloat at last
she paddles*

disappears.

Comment (2007). – After having picked another poem about leatherbacks to be included in the special leatherback focus issue, I received this wonderful poem by Donald Levering, submitted by Hal Avery. It was too good to resist, so we are adding this second poem to the poetry page. Donald was a volunteer at the Leatherback Earthwatch project in Costa Rica in January 2005 and was inspired to write this poem from his experience at Playa Grande. Donald Levering is an accomplished and often-published poet and author, and we were especially honored to publish this poem for the first time.

2007. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 6(1):160.
Composed January 2005 at Playa Grande, Costa Rica. Submitted by Harold Avery. Published with permission of the author.



Eastern Painted Turtle, *Chrysemys picta picta*, nesting in the wild at Aunt Betty Pond, Acadia National Park, Mount Desert Island, Bar Harbor, Maine, USA.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

The Egg and the Machine

Robert Frost

*He gave the solid rail a hateful kick,
From far away there came an answering tick,
And then another tick. He knew the code:
His hate had roused an engine up the road.
He wished when he had had the track alone
He had attacked it with a club or stone
And bent some rail wide open like a switch,
So as to wreck the engine in the ditch.
Too late though, now, he had himself to thank,
Its click was rising to a nearer clank,
Here it came breasting like a horse in skirts.
(He stood well back for fear of scalding squirts.)
Then for a moment all there was was size,
Confusion, and a roar that drowned the cries
He raised against the gods in the machine.*

*Then once again the sandbank lay serene.
The traveler's eye picked up a turtle trail,
Between the dotted feet a streak of tail,
And followed it to where he made out vague
But certain signs of buried turtle's egg;
And probing with one finger not too rough,
He found suspicious sand, and sure enough,
The pocket of a little turtle mine.
If there was one egg in it there were nine,
Torpedo-like, with shell of gritty leather,
All packed in sand to wait the trump together.
"You'd better not disturb me anymore,"
He told the distance, "I am armed for war.
The next machine that has the power to pass
Will get this plasm in its goggle glass."*

Comment (2003). – I was recently approached by a reader of this journal who told me that the Turtle Poetry page was the first section he would turn to whenever a new issue arrived. He told me how much he enjoyed the poetry presented here, but how he often disagreed with me about what constituted “good” versus “bad” poetry. Whether poetry is good or not is in the eye, ear, and mind of the reader, and each of us is as individual in our interpretation as the poetry is itself. For each of us there is a different emotional response—my hope as editor is that I succeed in finding different turtle poems that reach out to us in different ways. The selection this time avoids the question of good versus bad by choosing a poem from one of the world’s master poets (and my favorite). Living and writing in New Hampshire, Frost displays good knowledge of local turtle natural history, but mixes observations of the tail-marked trail of a Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) with an accurately-described clutch from a Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*). Nonetheless, it’s a novel use of turtle eggs as a symbol of the struggle between natural man and advancing development and machinery. And most would classify this poem by Frost as good—I hope our readers agree.

2003. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 4(3):742.

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First published as *The Walker* in: Kreymborg, A., Mumford, L., and Rosenfeld, P. (Eds.). 1928. *The Second American Caravan*. New York. Republished in: Frost, Robert. 1930. *Collected Poems*. New York: Henry Holt. Reprinted in: Lathem, E.C. (Ed.). 1979. *The Poetry of Robert Frost. The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., pp. 269–270.



Mojave Desert Tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, in the wild with Desert Candles blooming in the spring,
Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, Kern County, California, USA.

Photo by Bev Steveson.

Ancient Ones

Grace S. McLaughlin

*You —
who we name
tortoise —*

*Ancient ones,
you carry the weight of the world
on your backs.*

*From your burrows,
you watched
the mountains rise
and the seas recede,
the giant mammals disappear
and the condors soar less,
the two-legged ones arrive.*

*For 10,000 years
they named you sacred —
honored your presence,
your strength,
your persistence.*

*Then, the two-leggeds changed.
The new two-leggeds
no longer named you
sacred
but killed
for no reason
and did not honor
tortoise.*

*They brought new four-leggeds
in great numbers
who ate your food
and trampled your burrows and nests.*

*Machines came
that tore the land
crushed your families and homes.*

*From your burrows,
you watched.*

*Some two-leggeds grew in wisdom
And began to watch
And to care.
They learned about your lives
And protected your homes
They moved the four-leggeds
And kept machines away.*

*Once again,
they name you sacred
and honor
tortoise.*

*And you, ancient ones,
Who carry the weight of the world
on your backs
From your burrows,
You watch.*

Comment (1997). – This poem was presented at the Conference on Health Profiles, Reference Intervals, and Diseases of Desert Tortoises on 3 November 1996 at Soda Springs, California. It describes the plight of the Mojave Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*).

1997. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 2(3):456.
Composed 1 November 1996. Submitted by John L. Behler. Published with permission of the author.



Giant Galápagos Tortoises, *Chelonoidis porteri*, in the wild on abandoned farmland on Santa Cruz, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Elegy for the Giant Tortoises

Margaret Atwood

*Let others pray for the passenger pigeon
the dodo, the whooping crane, the eskimo:
everyone must specialize.*

*I will confine myself to a meditation
upon the giant tortoises
withering finally on a remote island.*

*I concentrate in subway stations,
in parks, I can't quite see them,
they move to the peripheries of my eyes*

*but on the last day they will be there;
already the event
like a wave travelling shapes vision:*

*on the road where I stand they will materialise,
plodding past me in a straggling line
awkward without water*

*their small heads pondering
from side to side, their useless armour
sadder than tanks and history,*

*in their closed gaze ocean and sunlight paralysed,
lumbering up the steps, under the archways
toward the square glass altars*

*where the brittle gods are kept,
the relics of what we have destroyed,
our holy and obsolete symbols.*

Comment (2006). – This poem by Margaret Atwood, a well-known Canadian writer, laments the gradual passing into extinction of giant tortoises. It speaks to their destruction at our hands, and how we honor their symbolic imagery—but not always their actual lives—reducing them eventually to nothing more than holy relics kept in glass cases in eternity's museum. As conservationists, each of us must specialize and become champions and advocates for our particular charges—in this case, turtles and tortoises—lest they materialize eventually from our peripheral vision, too late for help, on the road to certain extinction. The poem is a call to action, a call for personal empathy and commitment—a challenge to us to prevent this plodding, lumbering path towards extinction. Turtles and tortoises must remain living members of our natural world, not just destroyed, holy, and obsolete symbols of that world.

2006. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 5(2):335.

Published 1968 in *The Animals in That Country*. Reprinted in 1976: *Selected Poems, 1951–1975*.

Reprinted in 1997: McNamee, G. and Urrea, L.A. (Eds.). *A World of Turtles. A Literary Celebration*. Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, pp. 140–141.



Olive Ridley Turtles, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, during a mass nesting *arribada* on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.
Photo by David Rostal.

Turtles

Anonymous

*It was the weather that drove us in,
That rainy afternoon in May,
And the weather, I suppose, that drew us out
Cold and shivery, unprotected,
Gulping draughts of salt night air,
Amazed at clouds and the moistness of it all;
Our bare feet rejoiced at pebble and leaf,
Grateful for the grit between our parched toes
And the unmerciful touch of rain.*

*We Knew the sadness of walls,
the cold consistency of ceilings,
the dumb flatness of floors;
We knew the shrill insistence of right angles,
perfect squares, and well drawn lines;
We knew the slow steady sweep of the electric clock,
And we grew quiet.*

*No small wonder, then, with sense withdrawn,
that beach, and sea, and air at first
were numb and dull to me
Or rather We to them,
Shocked without the shells that encased us blind.
Tumbling as from sleep*

*We widened at the delicious randomness
Of sea clump, dark sea oat, Lone driftwood
And the unending conversation of surf.*

*We grew giddy with space,
Toes tracing the sensual curve of ocean's edge,
Skin drunk with salt, wet, and sand,
Until, sea-tossed, wind strewn, and scatterbrained,
We became whole again.
Something in the moon, or wind, or water,
Or none of these, something older
and more removed the sounding waves,
This beaten shore, the hard edged shells
That prick and stab into the present;*

*Something deep, primordial, an ancient call.
She answered, and left her weightless world
For the uncertainty of the shore.
How heavy the burden of herself became,
the massive shell, the tapered limbs
That scratched and clawed
for purchase in the too forgiving sand,*

*she knew alone,
and alone she bore, amidst the shadowy terrors
Of an alien world seen through eyes already tearing.*

*We watched her, breathless, perform the rite,
Marveled at her close-lidded patience, her energy,
The thick head that nodded slow acceptance
Of utter exhaustion, the unrelenting will
that rendered her oblivious to all
Save her pearly charges' burial.
We fondled her leathery skin,
Gazed into her eyes admired the thickness of her
wrinkled neck, and
thought deeply
of the soft expression on her darkened face.*

*The deed was done, the sand replaced,
She joined the sea again,
And we waded with her to the edge of our world,
Saw her graceful form retreat into the darkness.
In silence, we filled her clumsy tracks,
Erased all trace of what we'd seen,
And dreamed of another cosmic night
When sand shall scatter, and the sea
Shall open up her arms to turtle minions.*

Comment (2005). — This poem evokes for me a sense of the primeval connection between people and sea turtles and the role of the wind and weather in stimulating both our human behavior and turtles' nesting. The turtle reference might possibly represent a ridley, driven, like us, by the weather. I thought it a fitting rejoinder to the scientific discourses elsewhere in this volume on how weather and wind affect Kemp's ridley nestings. For me, the poem creates a sense of mystery and awe as we contemplate these ancient creatures of the sea and the natural forces that affect not only their behavior, but possibly, ours.

2005. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 4(4):960.
Poem obtained by Clay A. Johnson and posted 16 October 1995 on the CTURTLE listserve, author unknown.



Wood Turtle, *Glyptemys insculpta*, on a stream embankment in the wild in Quebec, Canada.
Photo by Mathieu Ouelette.

Turtle Glade West

Raymond A. Saumure

*Carapace of pyramids, Plastron worn down
Eggs off white, Soil so brown
Far she travelled, There to nest
By a Stream, in a Glade, to the West*

*Predator moves in, Quick to shell
Chewed up edges, Healed quite well
Far she travelled, Over a crest
To a Tree, in a Glade, to the West*

*Men come through, Turtles they find
Harvest they take, Last of kind
Far she travelled, Searched her best
Through the Grass, in a Glade, to the West*

*Struck by contrast, Shell against moss
Long since departed, Leaving a loss
Far she travelled, Now to rest
By a Fern, in a Glade, to the West*

Comment (2014). – I received this personal turtle poem many years ago from my good friend, collaborating editor, and turtle colleague, Ray Saumure. Like many of us turtle biologists, conservationists, and enthusiasts, Ray has a deep appreciation not only for the natural history and conservation needs of turtles, but also their roles as sources of inspiration for artistic and poetic expression. When he submitted the poem he wrote to me: “I do not consider myself a poet, and have no means of knowing if this is a “good” poem. I wrote it very late one night in 1998 while sick of reading research papers. It is a poetic expression of the natural history of a turtle in our current world. Although it was written with the Wood Turtle (*Clemmys* [now *Glyptemys*] *insculpta*) in mind, it could very well apply to many of the Asian species we hear so much about these days. I feel that this poem celebrates the beauty of nature, its textures, its colors. It speaks of the delicate balance of nature. It laments man’s short-sightedness as well as human-induced extinctions. However, it subtly offers hope...in the next generation of men and turtles. I guess poetry is an intensely personal thing...but I hope you like it nonetheless.” Well, I do like it, and I am pleased to finally be able to publish this poem here, both in honor of the kind of natural history studies Ray was pursuing while following this Wood Turtle to his “glade to the west”, and for Ray himself and his efforts in helping to disseminate and publish peer-reviewed scientific knowledge about turtles.

2014. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 13(2):286.

Composed 1998 in Québec, Canada.

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Female Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, up on a road embankment on a nesting excursion in the wild on Mount Desert Island, Maine, USA, being helped out of traffic harm's way.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

An Interruption

Robert S. Foote

*A boy had stopped his car
To save a turtle in the road;
I was not far
Behind, and slowed,
And stopped to watch as he began
To shoo it off into the undergrowth—*

*This wild reminder of an ancient past,
Lumbering to some Late Triassic bog,
Till it was just a rustle in the grass,
Till it was gone.*

*I hope I told him with a look
As I passed by,
How I was glad he'd stopped me there,
And what I felt for both
Of them, something I took
To be a kind of love,
And of a troubled thought
I had, for man,
Of how we ought
To let life go on where
And when it can.*

Comment (2013). – This poem describes the author's reflections on seeing a student stop his car on the road to help a Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, off into the underbrush. The geographic setting for the scenario is particularly poignant for me, as the incident occurred close to Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, where I was an undergraduate student over 40 years ago and first developed my own fascination for turtles, and the author, like me, is a medical doctor, and currently on staff at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. I contacted him in order to ask permission to reprint this poem and it turned out we had also both spent time at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, not many years apart. It's a small world and full of close personal interconnections and small degrees of separation that help to bind many of us together in our perceptions and concerns for turtles and their need for preservation and protection. When asked about the incident, he answered: "I think the scene I described is a pretty common one, and in this particular case it seemed clear to me that there was something much more profound going on in the situation than first met the eye." Would that we would all recognize this profound importance of letting life live and the parallel importance of doing no harm—guiding principles both in medicine and conservation. How similar these two disciplines are in their missions—one focused on saving and improving our human lives and caring for the health of our species, the other focused on saving and preserving our environment and all species and caring for the health of our planet. May we all recognize how critically important both these disciplines are.

2013. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 12(2):324.

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Published in Foote, Robert. 2012. *The Hidden Light*. Lebanon, NH: Whitman Communications, 77 pp. [p. 50].

Submitted by Thomas E.J. Leuteritz. Reprinted with permission of the author.



Matamata Turtle, *Chelus fimbriata*, captured in the wild in the Amazon Basin, South America.
Photo by Peter C.H. Pritchard, *Chelonian Research Institute*.

The Matamata

Thomas Hale Stubbs

*The creature lies in murky streams
Divesting victims of their dreams.
It stares ahead with beady eyes
That never see the sun-filled skies...
The leering smile, the roughened shell
Are features straight from Dante's Hell!
Its aspect, from mythology
Has roots in teratology.
This thing that moves along unseen
Through muddy waters never clear
Has senses that are ever keen,
Has powers that the wise must fear.
What is this dismal denizen
That leaves a trail of sloughing skin?
If you don't know by now, you oughta
It's something called the mata-moughta.*

Comment (2014). – Tom Stubbs, who unfortunately died young in 1979, was a very good friend of Peter Pritchard and wrote this poem for him. Tom welcomed and helped Peter adapt to his new home in the USA after he arrived from England to pursue his Ph.D. under Archie Carr at the University of Florida. He was an avid herpetologist and turtle enthusiast and conservationist, who earned a Master's degree in journalism and communications from the University of Florida in 1973, with a thesis entitled “Communicating Concern for Wildlife Conservation to an Apathetic Public”. Also an excellent photographer, he traveled extensively with Peter to South America, including Guyana, where he participated in sea turtle surveys and other turtle adventures—and when Peter and his wife Sibille had their second son, Dominic, they chose Tom as his honored godfather. This poem about Matamata turtles (*Chelus fimbriata*) by Stubbs does wonderful justice to their bizarre appearance. Matamatas are found in Guyana, and Peter once pulled 15 of these “dismal denizens” from a single small pond. Their rapid gape-and-suck feeding technique is a wonder to behold as they suddenly inhale small fish swimming too close to their rough camouflaged shells and wide “leering” jaws. Long ago, I had a Matamata for a pet that I named Hoover in descriptive honor of this amazing vacuum-like feeding mechanism. For more detailed information and photos of this bizarre chelid turtle, see the thorough species account written by Pritchard in our monograph series *Conservation Biology of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises* (www.iucn-tftsg.org/chelus-fimbriata-020/).
2014. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 13(1):129.

Composed approximately 1973 in Gainesville, Florida.
Submitted by Peter C.H. Pritchard.



Desert Box Turtle, *Terrapene ornata luteola*, in the wild near Portal, Arizona, USA.
Photo by Peter Paul van Dijk, *Re:wild*.

The Turtle

John Steinbeck

The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oat beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind, little spears and balls of tiny thorns, and all waiting for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement.

The sun lay on the grass and warmed it, and in the shade under the grass the insects moved, ants and ant lions to set traps for them, grasshoppers to jump into the air and flick their yellow wings for a second, sow bugs like little armadillos, plodding restlessly on many tender feet. And over the grass at the roadside a land turtle crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-domed shell over the grass. His hard legs and yellow-nailed feet threshed slowly through the grass, not really walking, but boosting and dragging his shell along. The barley beards slid off his shell, and the clover burrs fell on him and rolled to the ground. His horny beak was partly open, and his fierce, humerous eyes, under brows like fingernails, stared straight ahead. He came over the grass leaving a beaten trail behind him, and the hill, which was the highway embankment, reared up ahead of him. For a moment he stopped, his head held high. He blinked and looked up and down. At last he started to climb the embankment. Front clawed feet reached forward but did not touch. The hind feet kicked his shell along, and it scraped on the grass, and on the gravel. As the embankment grew steeper and steeper, the more frantic were the efforts of the land turtle. Pushing hind legs strained and slipped, boosting the shell along, and the horny head protruded as far as the neck could stretch. Little by little the shell slid up the embankment until at last a parapet cut straight across its line of march, the shoulder of the road, a concrete wall four inches high. As though they worked independently the hind legs pushed the shell against the wall. The head upraised and peered over the wall to the broad smooth plain of cement.

Now the hands, braced on top of the wall, strained and lifted, and the shell came slowly up and rested its front end on the wall. For a moment the turtle rested. A red ant ran into the shell, into the soft skin inside the shell, and suddenly head and legs snapped in, and the armored tail clamped in sideways. The red ant was crushed between body and legs. And one head of wild oats was clamped into the shell by a front leg. For a long moment the turtle lay still, and then the neck crept out and the old humerous frowning eyes looked about and the legs and tail came out. The back legs went to work, straining like elephant legs, and the shell tipped to an angle so that the front legs could not reach the level cement plain. But higher and higher the hind legs boosted it, until at last the center of balance was reached, the front tipped down, the front legs scratched at the pavement, and it was up. But the head of wild oats was held by its stem around the front legs.

Now the going was easy, and all the legs worked, and the shell boosted along, wagging from side to side. A sedan driven by a forty-year old woman approached. She saw the turtle and swung to the right, off the highway, the wheels screamed and a cloud of dust boiled up. Two wheels lifted for a moment and then settled. The car skidded back onto the road, and went on, but more slowly. The turtle had jerked into its shell, but now it hurried on, for the highway was burning hot.

And now a light truck approached, and as it came near, the driver saw the turtle and swerved to hit it. His front wheel struck the edge of the shell, flipped the turtle like a tiddly-wink, spun it like a coin, and rolled it off the highway. The truck went back to its course along the right side. Lying on its back, the turtle was tight in its shell for a long time. But at last its legs waved in the air, reaching for something to pull it over. Its front foot caught a piece of quartz and little by little the shell pulled over and flopped upright. The wild oat head fell out and three of the spearhead seeds stuck in the ground. And as the turtle crawled on down the embankment, its shell dragged dirt over the seeds. The turtle entered a dust road and jerked itself along, drawing a wavy shallow trench in the dust with its shell. The old humerous eyes looked ahead, and the horny beak opened a little. His yellow toe nails slipped a fraction in the dust.

Comment (2013). – This piece of poetic prose about an American Box Turtle, either *Terrapene carolina* or *T. ornata*, was written in 1939 by John Steinbeck [1902–1968] as a separate chapter in his Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck, who also received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, was one of the greatest of all American writers. His description of the box turtle's foray from a field up and onto a country roadway is wonderfully descriptive and melodic in its rhythm—a great piece of poetic writing.



Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, diving in the ocean off St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Atlantic Ocean.
Photo by Scott Eckert.

A Turtle's Dream

Abbey Lincoln

*often I sing when I'm all alone,
and no one can see me but me.
i think and wonder what i am
and how i came to be.*

*i can swim the ocean,
and it's deep and wide,
and in the house above me
abide.*

*maybe one day i'll fly like an eagle,
fly like a bird and go and go.
soar like an eagle,
walk like a lion,
although it won't be i know.*

*but i can swim the ocean,
and it's deep and wide,
and in the house above me
abide.*

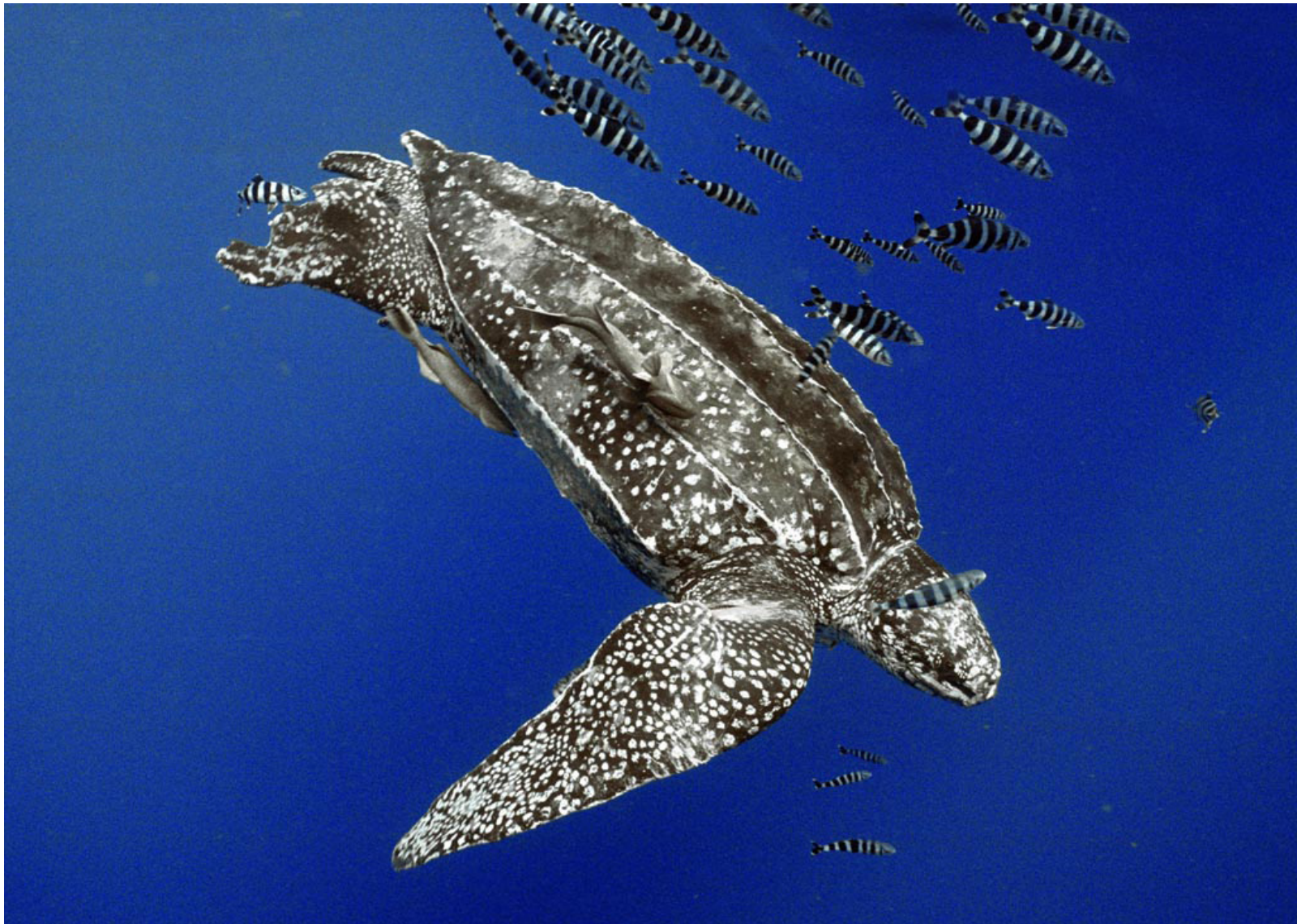
*i guess the time has come for me to go.
and look around for something, oh,
just moving in my house you know.
moving slowly is not really bad,
moving slowly you see
the wonders of the deep,
just waiting there for me.*

*and i can swim the ocean,
and it's deep and wide,
and in the house above me
abide.*

*and in the house above me
abide...*

Comment (2012). – Abbey Lincoln [1930–2010] was the stage name of an American jazz vocalist, songwriter, and actress whose real name was Anna Marie Wooldridge. Lincoln was one of many jazz singers influenced by Billie Holiday; her lyrics were often connected to the civil rights movement, and in 2003 she received a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master Award. She composed this poem/song in 1994 and released it on her jazz album, *A Turtle's Dream*. It is a wonderful and slow melodic jazz piece that flows and glides along like a sea turtle swimming languidly in the open sea. I found it a couple of years ago when browsing on iTunes and loved it. It now lives happily on my iPod and I listen to it from time to time as I drive or fly and take my favorite music with me. If you love turtles, especially sea turtles, and wonderful and slow jazz, then you need to listen to this piece and be transported into Abbey Lincoln's deep blue ocean and experience her evocative portrait of this slowly gliding turtle's dream.

2012. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 11(2):276.
Composed and copyright © 1994, published April 1995, compact disc, Verve 527 382-2, c1995, Moseka Music.



Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, diving in the ocean off southern Brazil, Atlantic Ocean, accompanied by Pilotfish (*Naucrates ductor*), and Suckerfish (*Remora remora*).
Photo by Guy Marcovaldi, Projeto TAMAR-Ibama.

Respiratto

J. Thomas Brown

*Let go the moment, like turtles at the bottom of the sea,
Whose lungs are spent and ache for air,
Unable to hold on any longer, rise toward the surface.
With outstretched necks they breach the cover of wavering light and inhale the
ocean breeze.*

*Sun rays dazzle and corruscate as hungry lungs insufflate.
Old memories are forsaken as senses dulled from the depths awaken.
But turtle, how can you endure returning to the ocean floor?
Then lids close on old wise eyes,
Sea Turtle dives to safety below, another moment... gone.*

Comment (2012). – I received this poem about sea turtles from a man who had just survived a pulmonary embolism and wrote the poem while recovering in the hospital. I responded to him as follows: “very nice. evocative and personal. reflective of your own lungs aching for air. I’d like to publish it in an upcoming issue of CCB. where were you when you wrote it? how did things turn out (well, I assume, or you wouldn’t be writing now). anything you’d like to add as a way of a commentary on the poem? do turtles evoke a sense of hope for one who is gasping for breath? turtle biologists and conservationists like to think of them as survivors. how did you feel about them as you wrote this poem?” And he answered: “Yes, things turned out well, especially since this was my second embolism, thirteen years later. When I had the first one I had no clue as to what was wrong with me. It started with a DVT [deep venous thrombophlebitis—large blood clots in the leg] – I thought I had a leg cramp and went to the gym and ran around the track, followed by leg exercises. That broke up the clots in my leg which travelled to my lungs. When the clots landed in my lungs I thought to myself, “So this must be what it’s like to drown.” I understand that others who have had pulmonary embolisms report the same feeling of drowning. I knew the symptoms right away the second time, but it turned out to be “extensive.” I spent seven days in the hospital, where I revised an earlier version of the poem I had written called *Let Go the Moment*. For me, the Sea Turtle is a powerful symbol of many things that relate to the human experience: the constant cycle of rising to the surface and diving again is like the progression of time, every moment coming to an end so another can begin; the letting go of old ideas to make way for new ones; the letting go of the stale things in our lives to improve or move in new directions. In the second version I changed the title to *Respiratto* – Latin for *to breathe* and added the phrase *hungry lungs insufflate* which I hope might be noticed as symbolic of the breath of life, or spirit, blown into the nostrils by God to give life. Whether you look at this as a scientific term or spiritual term doesn’t matter since both are really the same thing – only the terms are different. After 100,000,000 years of doing this, I don’t think the Sea Turtle cares which way you look at it either. The Sea Turtle is a positive image filled with hope to keep on going.”

For me personally, this poem as well as the poet’s own interpretation of his poem reminded me of how I felt ten years ago when my own lungs and I also faced our own “drowning” experience from Legionnaire’s pneumonia and we had to fight for every breath to stay alive and to avoid being placed on a respirator. Like the poet, I survived and found meaning in the constant renewal of life, the constant rising to the surface for a breath of air and the strength and renewed hope each of those cycles produces. Like the turtle, I found the strength and perseverance and inspiration to keep on going.



Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, after nesting in the wild on Playa Brava, Culebra, Puerto Rico, heading back into the ocean after having been tagged with a satellite transmitter.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

The Problem of Describing Chelonians

Matthew Godfrey and Lisa Campbell

*The moonlight glistens on the imbricated scutes
and we revel.*

*Tears run down her face
clearing sand flung up by her flippers
desperate to dig. Likewise, the tears
of the flatback.*

*This ancient lineage, this unique beast.
And the turtle danced. No.
The turtle rocked.*

*No. There are limits to saying
in language, what the turtle did.*

It is sometimes good for poetry to elude us.

Swim with the ancient mariner. Oh, I will.

Leatherbacks doing something on the beach.

Comment (2011). – One of my favorite endeavors for each issue of CCB is to select a poem for the turtle poetry page. Ever since we started this feature it has been a constant source of enjoyment and interaction with various people—both accomplished and renowned poets as well as skilled amateurs and turtle lovers expressing themselves in the poetic medium. The poem selected here is a direct outcome of one of those interactions—a friendly discussion several years ago between myself and Matthew Godfrey over what constituted “good” versus “bad” poetry in my previous selection process. We disagreed mildly about what had been good or not, and I suggested he try his hand at writing his own piece. The eventual outcome was excellent and light-hearted, as well as gently poking some welcome fun at other more serious poems we have published. I thank him and Lisa for their wonderful effort and it gives me great pleasure to finally publish it here on this page. I also asked Matthew to write a short editorial introduction to the poem, and he did: “In true good spirit, Anders issued a challenge during a chat at a sea turtle meeting several years ago: write your own and submit it. This was in response to my comment that it seemed like every poem in CCB was more serious than the last, and certainly there should be room for some lighter, less ponderous poems about turtles (for some lovely fun turtle poems, see *Celebrate the Sea: poetry written by 4-11 year olds*, published by the UK Marine Conservation Society—one of our favorites is ‘In the Ocean’, by Chloe Adcock at age 7, page 59). Many months went by without thinking more about it, until one day Lisa and I were inspired after reading a poem written by Robert Haas that captured the levity that may often embody the act of composing poetry. We are grateful to Anders for both challenging us and being receptive to the outcome.”

2011. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 10(2):294.

Composed 2005 in Québec, Canada. Published with permission of the authors.

“Shamelessly influenced by a poem by Robert Haas published in the *New Yorker* in June 2005.” — Matthew Godfrey.



A female Western Swamp Turtle, *Pseudemydura umbrina*, a Critically Endangered species from near Perth, Western Australia, in one of its only remaining tiny fenced-in protected wild habitats, right next to a major highway.

Photo by Gerald Kuchling.

Turtle Trails

C.B. Follett

*And what of the turtle
who finds her trail blocked
by the new asphalt road,
hot as just poured pitch,
and she with places to go...*

*and what's left of the turtle
who dares the hot tar
but can't beat tires, that singing
skid year-rings off her plastron,
crack her carapace into splinters
to bleach in the sun, and egg shells
like bits of plastic, shard-sharp
in dry air...*

*and what of tomorrow, of next year,
when turtles no longer come this way,
their span reduced to the width of a road;
generations of turtles
smacked to the side of a road that replaced
dirt trails, that dried up wetlands,
pulled taut the hills into flatland,
ripped reed and sedge from the runnels
of waterways, that took the land
from the turtle as surely as from the Indian,
taking her eggs, and her poems.*

Comment (2010). – C.B. ('Lyn) Follett is an accomplished American poet who won the 2001 National Poetry Book Award and now lives in California. She cares deeply about turtles. When I wrote her to ask for permission to reprint this wonderful poem, she answered as follows: "I would be delighted to have Turtle Trails published in your journal. I do love turtles and I worry so about them and their range. Turtle Trails is a poem I often read when I am presenting my work. I feel as if it represents my work and my concerns for the web of life. Turtles, such an old and venerable species are honored in the myths and beliefs of so many cultures. I think of the Native Americans, the Chinese. I visited Lonesome George the last of his species, living now in captivity in the Galapagos, where they keep hoping he will sire a continuation of his line. And it will be a loss to all of us if he doesn't. When I was a child, I used to wander the marshes and ponds in our town looking for turtles. We'd have some sort of communion while I examined the beauty of their shells, the economy of their beings, the bright alertness of their eyes. I thought them curiously beautiful then, and still do." For me, this poem conjures forth images of the changing face of our modern landscape—of rampant human development causing relentless loss of our habitats, wilderness, and ecosystems, as well as gradually destroying our heritage of both cultural and biological diversity. Turtles being crushed on the asphalt road also in a way represent our habitats and biodiversity and natural world being crushed on the road of destructive development. We must find a way to balance that development with sound science and an ethic of conservation, lest we all lose our heritage—our natural world and this planet we all inhabit.

2010. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 9(2):310.
Published in Follett, C.B. 1998. *Visible Bones*. Plain View Press, 130 pp.
Originally appeared in *Green Fuse*. Reprinted with permission of the author.



Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, nesting in the wild on Playa Grande, Las Baulas de Guanacaste National Park, Costa Rica, with Michael Rhodin observing—his first encounter with a Leatherback.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Playa Grande Beach

Michael H.J. Rhodin

*As though the weight of a thousand generations
had been laid across its back,
the black form rose between the waves,
pulling itself onto midnight sand.*

*In the absence of light
the Costa Rican heavens fell upon the shore,
illuminating the leatherback sea turtle
in her quest up the beach.*

*The ancient creature turned, eyes to her home,
and with laborious, alternating strokes,
dug her back flippers into the ground, cupping the sand,
and hurling it in a shower to either side.*

*Then, 3 feet later, the digging stopped and I
crawled forward, sand clinging to my palms and knees,
a wet, spherical egg dropped
into the womb of the earth.*

*I watched as every chance at life
was given up to the earth by the mother;
88 chances for their race to survive.
88 prayers in the face of extinction.*

*Nest completed,
I touched her soft shell
as she crawled back to the ocean
her path ingrained in my mind.*

Comment (2001). – This poem was written by my son at age 20, nearly two years after seeing Leatherback Turtles nesting on the beach at Playa Grande in Costa Rica. This had been his first experience with sea turtles and it left him with an indelible and powerful emotional image. His experience was similar to my own first encounter with nesting Leatherbacks on a beach in Mexico in the early 1980s. These types of encounters leave most of us with a heightened sense of personal caring and responsibility for the endangered turtles of the world and help make us better conservationists, whether we work directly in the world of turtle conservation or not. The more people that we can encourage to experience these types of turtle encounters the better — it is the unconverted masses that need to be brought to this natural altar and allowed to experience and hopefully understand the sacredness of the moment, and the emotional need to preserve it for future generations. Then perhaps we will slowly win the battle to help preserve the turtles of the world.

2001. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 4(1):231.
Composed November 1999. Published with permission of the author.



Gopher Tortoise, *Gopherus polyphemus*, in sand dune scrub habitat on Lake Wales Ridge in Florida, USA.
Photo by Kevin Main, *Archbold Biological Station*.

Population Density Studies

Marian L. Griffey

*Scientists gather in a smallish room,
lay their years of labor and hearts' dreams in the video carousel
and flash them flat against the unfeeling screen.
Each has a goal: To develop a range of protection.
Gopher tortoise; box turtle; salamander;
alligator; black bear; white-footed mouse
The room is not large enough to hold the list.
All are worthy of the measure of life given them by these caring people.
Each has a need far greater than any had imagined,
a range farther reaching than lofty man has ever seen before.*

*Teachers meet in a shrinking house,
prop their lives of dedication and ideals against a world grown—overnight—unknown.
Each has a hope: To build a safe place for children.
Black; White; Hispanic; Native American;
mulatto; Latino; boy; girl
The union is not strong enough to hold the list.
All are worthy of the effort to make a life free from hunger, fear, oppression.
Each has a spark for dreaming and an appetite for greater things;
but, their range of protection needs further boundaries
than mortal mind has yet conceived.*

Comment (2002). – This poem evokes for me the sense of urgency and frustration that many of us feel in our conservation and protection efforts, as we face the mounting evidence of overwhelming and increasing threats to those species (or children) with whose care we have been entrusted. How can we ever do enough to save them all? How can we ever reverse the trends and provide safe havens for our charges? Whether they be turtles or tortoises, other animal species, or human children, they are all our charges, dependent on us for their well-being and secure futures. How do we define and fulfill our responsibilities? How do we provide protection? The answers are ever harder, the challenges ever greater, the needs ever more encompassing. Some might ask, why carry on? Why fight for the right of species to survive? We might as well ask, why fight for our own right to survive? Our lives are inextricably tied to those of the species that surround us and we can no sooner give up on their survival than we can on our own. All our needs are far greater than any had imagined, but somehow we must all seek solutions.

2002. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 4(2):508.
Composed 1997. Published with permission of the author.



Male Big-headed Turtle, *Platysternon megacephalum*, in the wild in northern Thailand—ongoing illegal collection for the pet trade and for consumption for perceived medicinal benefits qualified the species as IUCN Red List Endangered by 2000 and Critically Endangered by 2011.

Photo by Peter Paul van Dijk, *Re:wild*.

To a Turtle

Maxine McCray Miller

*Taciturn turtle, Sparton of simple space,
Of what do you think as you make slow pace
Across the humming highway's span?
So small a life to immerse
In the ferment of the Universe!
Yet, someway, you, too, are akin to man.*

*What man of words could more assure
That simple things will e'er endure
Tho centuries never pause;
Tho civilizations fall and rise,
Nothing ever falsifies
The immortality of God's great laws.*

*Tenacious turtle, bent on destined ways!
Unyielding man no more conveys
His faith in future dawns.
World-bound in spinning, sonant space,
He lifts his resolute, little face.
Salute the turtle thrusting on.*

Comment (2006). – This poem about a turtle, making his way across a dangerous highway (Sparton in Greek mythology made a journey), surrounded by rushing cars and humming tires, represents the challenges and risks we all face as we push forward against forces beyond our control in order to make progress. Yet progress we must make, whether we are turtle or man, and persevering in the face of challenge and change is our inherent nature. On a personal level, as I gradually turn the reins of the production of this journal increasingly over to others, I reflect on the journey that has brought us this far and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, and like the poet who wrote this poem, I salute the turtle thrusting on, as we gradually build an increasingly connected international chelonian conservation community dedicated to helping the turtle persevere and persist.



Adult female Florida Softshell Turtle, *Apalone ferox*, from Leon County, Florida, USA.
Photo by Matthew Aresco.

Dead Turtle

Patricia B. Walters

*Curious that I should want to eulogize a turtle
Perhaps it was his ignominious death
(Why did I think of it as male?)
That still form by the road*

*The grass that greens the median barrier had just been mowed
The blades that clipped had ripped the turtle's shell
And threw him...or he dragged himself
Exposed upon the slab*

*When first I sighted him, I thought he was alive
But absence of response was too abject
He eloquently spoke of death
Next day he was still there*

*Each time I passed, I tried to turn my eyes away
Not see this tiny, tiresome tragedy
But to ignore him was to slight
All victims man has left*

*So I watched while summer sun tanned him to leather
A kind of rigor mortis raised his head
Last gesture of primordial pride
Of death with dignity*

*There was a gradual sinking, shrinking of the corpse
Like the closing of the covers of a book
Some unknown force then lifted him
And one day he was gone*

Comment (2006). – This poem about a dead turtle on the road, probably a Florida Softshell, *Apalone ferox*, reminds us of the all-too-often sad outcome of interactions between turtles and man, especially man's development as represented by highways and automobiles and the destructive nature of our technology. As the turtle in the poem was gone one day, if we are not careful to preserve our natural heritage, all turtles will be gone one day. But though we are the problem, we are also the solution, and our efforts to preserve turtles and their habitats will make a difference for future generations. The survival of turtles in Florida and elsewhere will depend on our efforts.



Female Leatherback Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, nesting in the wild on Playa Brava, Culebra, Puerto Rico, after having been tagged with a satellite transmitter—Molly Lutcavage and Carol Conroy observe.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Culebra Leatherbacks

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*Down from the hills
down to the shore
by moonlight we descended
on the coast of Culebra
to reach Playa Brava*

*Silvery crescent arching
glowing, stretching below us
a narrow white sliver
beckoning in the night*

*We stepped onto the beach
and felt transported in time—
to an Age before Man
no evidence of his presence
save our prints in the sand*

*Full moon rose above
with Mars and companions
riding through the night
reflecting and glittering
the sand glowing light*

*Boldly we stepped
strode down the beach
Rolando and Molly
Carol and me*

*Our quest in the night
nesting turtles to find
arriving in darkness
reflecting moonlight*

*Emerging from breakers
surveying the shore
hauling their bulk
from out of the sea*

*Leatherbacks emerging
black bodies heaving
flippers thrusting
progress halting*

*Slowly onto sand
wary of disturbance
nest sites to find*

*follow ancient urges
replenish their kind*

*Rituals of nesting
slow dances defined
sensed deep in the soul
of the leatherback's mind*

*Body pit, egg chamber,
oviposition,
covering, camouflaging,
steps in her ritual
danced in the sand*

*Brine from salt glands
wells from her eyes
mixes with sand
like tears for her kind*

*Head covered in sand
held still for my touch
sand brushed away
with the palm of my hand*

*Her role that night
to help us understand
her travels, her life
her fate in the seas*

*A transmitter to be tracked
by satellites in space
attached to her back
with surgical care*

*Beacon in place
she crawls down the beach
returns to the sea
and the lives of her kind*

*their lives, their future,
their fate and survival—
held in our hands
to cherish and care.*

Comment (2007). – I wrote this poem after my first visit to the Leatherback nesting beach at Playa Brava on Culebra, Puerto Rico. The beach there was stunning, with no visible lights from human development. It was primeval and magical, and we were surrounded by several Leatherbacks nesting. We used novel orthopedic bone attachment techniques for application of satellite transmitters to nesting Leatherbacks, techniques that we have continued to modify and improve over the years. Our research and conservation efforts over the last several years on Culebra and in Fajardo have involved cooperative efforts between our team (led by Molly Lutcavage and including at various times Sam Sadove, Charlie Blaney, myself, Carol Conroy, Russ Andrews, Yonat Swimmer, Kelly Stewart, Michael Rhodin, and Jeanette Wyneken) and our enthusiastic Puerto Rican turtle conservation hosts and research collaborators (Hector Horta, Carlos Diez, Rolando Soler, Jovino Marquez-Soto, and others). The island of Culebra and its friendly people and magical beauty has won its way into our hearts and it is our fervent hope that the isolated and near-pristine leatherback nesting beaches there and in Fajardo and Puerto Rico's Northeast Ecological Corridor will receive the on-going and improved protected status that they so richly deserve.

2007, *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 6(1):159.
Composed June 1999, revised February 2007.



Radiated Tortoises, *Astrochelys radiata*, mating successfully in semi-natural captivity in the Berenty Reserve, southern Madagascar.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

The Turtle

Ogden Nash

*The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks
Which practically conceal its sex,
I think it clever of the turtle
In such a fix to be so fertile.*

Tortoises

Ogden Nash

*Come crown my brow with leaves of myrtle,
I know the tortoise is a turtle,
Come carve my name in stone immortal,
I know the tortoise is a turtle.
I know to my profound despair,
I bet on one to beat a hare.
I also know I'm now a pauper,
Because of its tortley, turtley, torper.*

Comment (2015). – I've always loved these short humorous poems about turtles and tortoises by Ogden Nash [1902–1971], especially the first one about turtles and their fertility, which, of all the turtle poems out there in the world, is probably the most well-known. Indeed, turtles are not only remarkably fertile despite their apparently obstructive plated anatomy—they overcome these obstacles quite well...and extend their fertility...into old-age longevity...with no signs of senility...

The Turtle: Published in Nash, Ogden. 1931. *Hard Lines*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 104 pp. Copyright © 1931 by Ogden Nash.
Tortoises: Published 1949 in *Verses for Camille Saint-Saëns' The Carnival of the Animals*. Columbia Masterworks recording.



Adult male Western Hermann's Tortoise, *Testudo hermanni hermanni*, from Albera, Catalonia, Spain.
Photo by Albert Bertolero.

Turtle Origins

Joseph W. Gastinger

*One thought the turtle anapsid
But now perhaps they're diapsid
It's confusing to me
That old turtle tree
What the twigs and branches and sap did.*

Turtle Names

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*Some have called you Chelonia
or Chelonii, an Order of Reptilia
some have known you as Testudinata
or the long-forgotten Cataphracta*

*But best you be Testudines
the name used by Linnaeus
the plural of the type Testudo
defines the group with ease.*

Comment (2007). – Defining Turtle Diversity: A Light-Hearted Poetic View. *Turtle Origins*: Written as a personal poetic reflection on the evolutionary question of turtle origins as published in Rieppel, O. 1999. Turtle origins. *Science* 283:945–946. *Turtle Names*: Written as a personal poetic reflection on the nomenclatural question of what scientific name to use for the monophyletic group defining all turtles and tortoises [Testudines].

Published in Shaffer, H.B., FitzSimmons, N.N., Georges, A., and Rhodin, A.G.J. 2007. Defining Turtle Diversity: Proceedings of a Workshop on Genetics, Ethics, and Taxonomy of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises. *Chelonian Research Monographs* 4:200 • Copyright © 2007 by *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Turtle Origins: Composed April 1999, submitted by Martin A. Larson. Published with permission of the author.

Turtle Names: Composed April 2001, revised November 2007.



Large adult Bolson Tortoise, *Gopherus flavomarginatus*, in semi-natural captivity near the Mapími de Bolson Biosphere, Chihuahua, Mexico.
Photo by Eric V. Goode, *Turtle Conservancy*.

Agua de Beber

Taylor Edwards

*Solitary tortoise
he is content alone
Among the snakes and lizards
he calls the desert home*

*Then she arrived
a beautiful monsoon
And now this barren desert
is starting to bloom*

*Her graceful shower
her warm, gentle drops
Awaken the tortoise
and saturate his thoughts*

*He wasn't even thirsty
until she touched his lips
And now he is longing
for another sip*

*Chorus:
Agua de beber, agua de beber
agua de beber, agua de beber
Agua de beber*

*The tortoise searches for her
and finds a tranquil pool
And the still water
reflects his heart is full*

*Ripples on her surface
destroy tranquility
The tortoise is frightened
she will soon no longer be*

*This ephemeral pond
with whom he wants to stay
Has quenched his thirst
but evaporates away*

*Dry desert soils
long for summer rain
The tortoise heart desires
to see her once again*

*Agua de beber, agua de beber
agua de beber, agua de beber
Agua de beber
and he'll aestivate without her*

Comment (2007). – This song about a desert tortoise was written and composed by Taylor Edwards, inspired by a classic by Antonio Carlos Jobim. Agua de Beber translates to “water to drink”, and, in Brazil, it is a phrase that refers to a source of knowledge or understanding. I thought it particularly poignant that we publish this song/poem in the same issue in which the same author has also applied his professional scientific interests to an analysis of genetic phylogeography of the desert tortoise (Murphy, Berry, Edwards, and McLuckie, this volume). Each of us, no matter how professionally involved with turtles, also harbors a passion for these animals on which we work—sharing that passion through the expression of poetry or song makes each of us somehow more human and emphasizes our commitment to their conservation. I salute and celebrate all who give expression to this humanity.

2007. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 6(2):325.
Submitted by Taylor Edwards September 2007. Published with permission of the author.



Adult male Pinta Giant Galapagos Tortoise, *Chelonoidis abingdonii*—Lonesome George, the last surviving individual of his species, here in captivity on Santa Cruz, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, in 1982 with Anders Rhodin—his species is now extinct, having died alone of old age in 2012.
Photo by Peter C.H. Pritchard, *Chelonian Research Institute*.

The Ponderous Galapagos Turtle

Charles Levenstein

*The ponderous Galapagos turtle
lies on his belly,
munches greens,
contemplates time,
how wondrous it seems:*

*When I was a youth
did I stand on my feet,
arms akimbo?
Did I despise my fat parents
and the rocks from which they came?
Was I a boy preoccupied with copulation?
Did I join up to save the nation?
Did I develop a sneer?
Did I know why I was here?*

*Of course not.
Turtles don't go on the road,
we enjoy our isle,
reproduce in a pile,
then eat a lot,
or as much as we can get.
Kelp's not boring,
plenty to do right here
without running off.
Poor humans with their cameras.
And the wheel.
And the sail.
And fire, of course.*

*They start out stupid and must be tended,
rear ends wiped, clothing mended.
At twenty, though, they know
everything there is to know.

Time seems slow on my Galapago.
I swim, I think,
I have another drink,

Thus spake the turtle,
beached on his belly.
Time has not made him particularly wise
and he's become too tough to eat.*

Comment (2008). – I found this amusing poem about Galápagos turtles on the internet, an increasingly amazing source of materials and inspiration (and a lot of dubious material as well). The author is a retired professor of social economics who has found a second calling in poetry. This poem reminds me of my own travels to the Galápagos and the inspiration I found there, as well as the humor in turtles contemplating their adolescence and perspective in life and among species. They seem to have their lives figured out — “I swim, I think, I have another drink” — not bad choices for a lifestyle. Would that it were that easy for all the rest of us.

2008. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 7(1):156.

Downloaded 7 April 2005 from <http://poetry.about.com/library/bl1001ibpc3.htm>. InterBoard Poetry Competition, Third Place Winner, October 2001.
Published in 2006 in Levenstein, Charles. *Poems of World War III*. Lulu Press. Reprinted with permission of the author.



Adult female Tabasco Mud Turtle, *Kinosternon acutum*, from Belize.
Photo by John B. Iverson.

Why be a Mud Turtle?

Stewart Edward White

I should certainly hate to be a mud turtle!
He lives encased in a hard shell into which he
withdraws at the slightest hint of opposition.
He is wholly unreceptive: when anything un-
familiar is presented to him he refuses to argue
or even to examine; he just retires. He is by
the nature of his shell incapable of looking up-
ward; and it is quite evident by the unvarying
routine of his days that he considers a moldy-
log muddy-water life the only sensible exis-
tence. In some remote geologic age, when first
the marine reptiles were venturing out upon
the land, he made his choice. His scaly broth-
ers, crawling painfully toward their dreams of
dry land and wings and the promise of air, left
him smug and content in the primordial slime.
Why be a mud turtle?

Comment (2008). – This poetic prose about a mud turtle was written as a foreword (and admonition) in a self-help book aimed at raising the reader from a life of unhappy complacency with his lot in life to an exalted desire to improve himself and find true religion and meaning for his existence. Evoking the evolutionary path from primitive crawling marine reptiles to soaring birds conjures up nicely what the turtle missed and what the compliant reader would gain as an ultimate reward from following the advice in the book. And what if the mud turtle had not made the simple moldy-log choice, what could he have become? Perhaps a sleek, fast, almost winged sea turtle soaring through the oceans, or an even faster, sleeker softshell turtle racing through rivers. Obviously, many “mud” turtles did make the decision to venture further than that first moldy log—and to evolve—and all our present (and former) turtle diversity is a testament to that evolution.

2008. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 7(2):286.
Published in White, S.E. 1928. *Why be a Mud Turtle?* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, and Co.
Submitted by Brian D. Horne.



Chinese Softshell Turtles, *Pelodiscus sinensis*, for sale as food items in a market in Hong Kong in the late 1970s.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Meat Market

Michael Christensen

*Strange softshell turtles
large and flaccid,
stacked in plastic boxes
next to the sidewalk
on a cold hard butcher shop floor.*

*Maybe you were
raised on a farm,
where captive born turtles
knew nothing of freedom
fattened for the kill
your every need, supplied.*

*More likely though
you were trapped this summer,*

*wrenched from your native watery
the waters you will only know
in your last turtle dreams.
We are not your friends,
our actions do not deceive you.
Even I, empathetic to your plight
will never be trusted.
How frankly you stare,
how brave you seem
in spite of these odds.*

*How I wished for a moment
I were as brave,
how I wished since that day
I could forget those eyes.*

Comment (2009). – This poem describes the emotional response of coming face-to-face with live softshell turtles being sold in a meat market, most likely in Chinatown, San Francisco, California. The commercial trade in turtles for food, medicinal products, and pets continues on a huge scale around the world and this scene is repeated millions of times (see the article on trade in turtle shell for medicine in Taiwan by Chen et al. in this issue of CCB). The Asian turtle trade has gradually expanded to include Oriental communities around the world, and huge quantities of turtles, both wild and farmed, are harvested for that trade. Originally confined primarily to China, the turtle consumption trade has spread in widening circles of destructive unsustainability through Southeast and South Asia, and has also reached the USA, where softshell turtles and other species are harvested in huge quantities and either exported to China or transported to domestic Chinese communities like Chinatown. Several states have already enacted regulations prohibiting the harvest of wild turtles as a response to this growing threat. Other states, such as Florida, where a massive trade in farmed softshells originates, are currently considering enhanced regulations. In fact, as we go to press, Florida is considering enacting new rules prohibiting commercial harvest of wild turtles—a welcome action stimulated partially by a group of turtle experts, including some of the editorial board members of CCB, who approached the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Governor Charlie Crist and convinced them of the need for tougher regulations to protect wild turtles in Florida. By speaking out and working together, we can all make a difference, and maybe someday we will no longer have to see live turtles waiting for slaughter in the meat markets of the world.

2009. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 8(1):106.

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In Memoriam



Cylindraspis vosmaeri

Stuffed adult male Rodrigues Giant Saddleback Tortoise, *Cylindraspis vosmaeri*, from Rodrigues Island, Mauritius, Indian Ocean (specimen MNHN 1883.558, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France). This species was exploited into extinction by about 1800, not long after its discovery by humans.

Photo by Roger Bour.

Fallen Giants

Mark Summers

*“Big-is-always-better”, notably so when picking fruit
If fruit is giant tortoise big, picking’s awfully sweet
And so it went for the behemoth isolationists
When they met Man on voyage of exploration
Or should that be voyage of exploitation
Seychelles, Galapagos, Mauritius all ‘discovered’
And all held creeps of prehistoric laggards
Dilly-dallying browser/grazers that could but crawl
Their comedown, though, was not a question of speed
Rather, their culinary value; stowed away, ever ready*

*Viande fraîche to be served up on some distant wave
Or rich tribute to he who got castaway on their isle
Their isle, found, became routine port of call
Their plenty became our plenty; while it lasted
Twenty Indian Ocean giants down to just one wild
Capable of an inning we humans but dream of
Yet we cut theirs horribly short
Leaving but a few spent shells
Emptied of existence.*

But one example:

Cylindraspis inepta

Saddle-backed Mauritius Giant Tortoise

Extinct ca. early 1700s

Mauritius, Indian Ocean

Comment (2009). – This poem arrived by email one day—as so many now do—testament to the passion and personal needs of so many to express themselves in poetry when describing the plight of turtles. I’ve walked that path myself, composing several poems to celebrate and capture the essence of turtles and their need for preservation and protection. The author, a scientist like so many of us, has reached into his inner space to find and express beauty and rhythm in the poetic description of these inspiring animals. The inspiration and passion shown by people like him is inspiration in itself. Would that there were more of us in the world who lament the loss of species and the natural world—would that there were more of us to stand up for the preservation and protection of species and habitats, and to fight for the survival of our natural world and all its beauty and diversity. Would that the rest of the world felt as we do...

2009. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 8(2):227.

Composed March 2009, submitted July 2009 as part of a pre-publication poetry book on the Sixth Extinction. Published with permission of the author.



Last known wild Red River Giant Softshell Turtle, *Rafetus swinhoei*, from outside Hanoi, Vietnam, when briefly captured before being released back into his native habitat. This species has been exploited down to only four known remaining individuals, two in Vietnam and two in China.

Photo by Tim McCormack.

White Turtle Under A Waterfall

Wang Wei

*The waterfall on South Mountain hits the rocks,
tosses back its foam with terrifying thunder,
blotting out even face-to-face talk,
Collapsing water and bouncing foam soak blue moss,
old moss so thick
it drowns the spring grass.
Animals are hushed.
Birds fly but don't sing
yet a white turtle plays on the pool's sand floor
under riotous spray,
sliding about with the torrents.
The people of the land are benevolent.
No angling or net fishing.
The white turtle lives out its life, naturally.*

Comment (2011). – Wang Wei [701–761 A.D.] was a prominent Chinese poet, musician, painter, and statesman in the Tang Dynasty of the 8th Century. He was one of the most famous men of arts and letters of his time, yet was also exiled from time to time as his political fortunes vacillated. He lived in southern Shaanxi Province in the Qinling Mountains, where he painted and wrote poetry, often about nature, especially mountains and hill streams. It has been said that the quality of Wang Wei's poems can be summed up as holding a painting within them, and in observing his paintings, that within the painting there is poetry. This poem paints a vivid image of a thundering waterfall and its spray-soaked mossy stones and banks with turbulent sandy pool below, in which a white turtle swims playfully along the bottom. Of the three freshwater turtle species currently known to inhabit hill streams in southern Shaanxi (*Cuora pani*, *Mauremys reevesii*, and *Pelodiscus sinensis*), this one is probably meant to be the latter, a Chinese Softshell Turtle, that sometimes occurs as a light-colored albino variant. The sentiments expressed about the people of the land being benevolent and not hunting or harming the turtle, but letting it live out its life naturally, apparently reflects not only Wang Wei's views on respect for the turtle itself, but a personal view about allowing retired statesmen and exiled officials to live out their lives naturally. Let us hope that today's people of the land are as benevolent as their predecessors and that they too allow the turtles in their hill streams and everywhere to live out their lives naturally. It is almost too late for many of them, as most of China's turtles are now virtually extinct in the wild, with only tiny remnant populations clinging to rapidly-shrinking habitats and being decimated by overwhelming exploitation. Perhaps Wang Wei's time-honored poetry can help remind today's people of the land, whether in China or anywhere else in the World, that their heritage of ancient turtles should also be allowed to live out their lives naturally.

2011. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 10(1):158.

Published in Wang, W. 1991. *Laughing Lost in the Mountains*. Poems of Wang Wei.

Translations by Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, and Xu Haixin. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.



Adult Spotted Turtle, *Clemmys guttata*, from Florida, USA.
Photo by Barry Mansell.

The First Spotted Turtle Awakens

Jacqueline D. Litzgus

*The sun glistens
reflected from the black of a wet carapace
recently emerged from the water
to gather all of the heat
this early Spring day has to offer.*

*I watch and ponder
the pinpoints of light are dazzling
complementing your distinctive yellow spots
interrupting the black continuum
like stars in an impenetrable night sky.*

*A head extends
revealing brilliant orange patches.
Your scaled limbs emerge
from your protective form, unchanged for ages
to sparkle like crystals in granite.*

*How many Springs
have those orange-flecked eyes gazed upon?
How many times
have you surveyed this scene?*

*Groggy still from Winter's chill
lingering in the early morning.
Yet you have made the migration
from your winter refuge, driven by an innate force
to await the coming
of the rest of your species.*

*A courtship waltz
has been danced at this pond
every Spring since the humans came.
As the roads encroached
and the dwellings followed
you have been a player
in the generations of your own that have and will come.*

*Pray the roads don't come too close!
Pray the dwellings are not built upon your home!
Pray they don't come to pack you into boxes and crates!*

*Bask upon your hummock
until the others come
to join the Dance;
A Dance to celebrate life.
Revel in the present pristine beauty.*

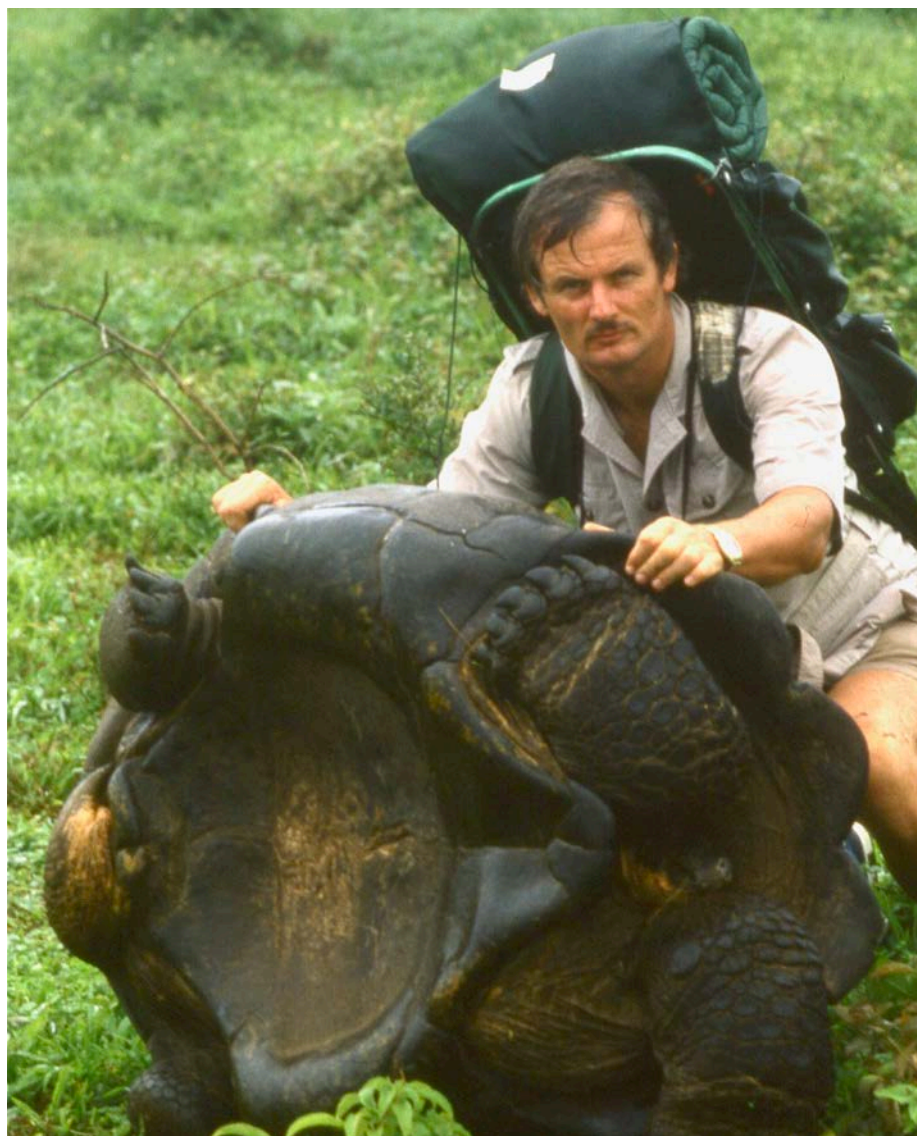
*As your shell dries and you blend in with the dry leaves
that will bloom green in a few short weeks,
I stand aside and watch
and hope that forever
you will remain here untouched.*

Comment (2016). – This lovely poem about spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) emerging to bask in a southern Canadian wetland was written by Jackie Litzgus back in 1998. When I chose it for inclusion in this issue, I asked her about it, and she responded: “I wrote that poem while thinking about heading to my long-term study site to conduct my annual survey, and I was thinking about one wetland in particular where the spotted turtles had been monitored since 1977. I have been surveying that site every year since 1991. Interestingly (and to my great disappointment!), that wetland has undergone substantial succession since 1998 when I wrote the poem, and I no longer find spotted turtles there. It is quite amazing to think of all of the things that have happened since 1998!” Jackie is now a renowned biology professor at Laurentian University in Ontario, where she is teaching and training the next generation of ecologists and conservationists. May they all learn and benefit from her passionate approach to her field of endeavor. On a personal note, the first wild turtles I ever observed and collected were two beautiful spotted turtles basking on hummocks in a small wetland in Carlisle, Massachusetts, on a sunny chilly early spring morning in the early 1970s. I have never forgotten the experience or the brilliant beauty of those turtles.

2016. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 15(1):163.

Composed 25 April 1998.

Submitted by Jacqueline D. Litzgus.



Peter C.H. Pritchard and an adult male Western Santa Cruz Giant Tortoise, *Chelonoidis porteri*, in La Reserva, Santa Cruz, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, 1982.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

In Honor of Peter C.H. Pritchard

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*From the beginning, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.*

*From Britain to America, from the cold to the warmth,
you left your home country for Florida's shores,
the first book you published, *Living Turtles of the World*,
promoted your knowledge—your passions unfurled.*

*Sharing your knowledge with students and colleagues
among them, myself, inspired by your guidance,
mentored and guided by a colleague, a friend,
the diversity of turtles I began to comprehend.*

*From your home in Oviedo, your work flourished widely,
the *Encyclopedia of Turtles*, and saving Kemp's Ridley,
writing and traveling, popularizing and promoting—
*Alligator Snappers, Leatherbacks, Galápagos tortoises—
and Rafetus softshells, their tragic decline describing.**

*Your museum and Chelonian Research Institute created,
and named Florida's Man of the Year, honor abounded,
then the Behler Award, further lauded in your sphere,
in resounding acclamation by your chelonian peers.*

*But the passage of time unfolds, unrelenting, unforgiving,
impacting our age, and our years ever mounting;
but time is our friend, not our foe—
each day is a gift, not a woe—
may our time and days continue to grow.*

*Now, as always, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.*

*Thank you, Peter—Mr. Turtle—my friend,
for all you have done and all you have been—
a mentor, a colleague, a guide—
and always—a friend.*

Comment (2016). – I wrote this poem to honor my longtime friend and close colleague, Peter Pritchard, on the occasion of the Special Session dedicated to him and his Chelonian Research Institute organized by Chuck Schaffer and Rick Hudson at the 14th Annual TSA/TFTSG Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles in New Orleans, Louisiana, on 2 August 2016. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the session to read the poem myself, as I was temporarily hospitalized by a serious medical event that occurred the day before—reminding myself and all of us how fragile life and health can be, and how important it is to fully value every day and the opportunities each of us have to pursue our dreams and aspirations and to continually strive to make a difference and to leave a mark on the world around us. Peter devoted his life to turtles and their conservation, and I always looked up to him as a role model and mentor. My trip with him to the Galápagos in 1982 (especially our visit to Pinzón to see *Chelonoidis duncanensis* in the wild) inspired me to gradually shift from my earlier focus on turtle taxonomy to becoming increasingly focused on matters of turtle conservation. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude for inspiring me, as he has also inspired countless others. For myself and many others, he was always “Mr. Turtle” – the acknowledged leading turtle authority and role model we aspired to emulate. I would like to think this poem captures some of that sentiment and that it honors his life and accomplishments in some small but meaningful way.

2016. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 15(2):293. Reprinted in *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* (2020) 19(1):4 and in *African Sea Turtle Newsletter* (2021) 15:119.
Composed 24 July 2016. Read by our close mutual friend Russell A. Mittermeier on my behalf at the Special Session honoring Peter Pritchard
at the 14th Annual TSA/TFTSG Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, 2 August 2016.



Bleached carapace of adult Eastern Woodland Box Turtle, *Terrapene carolina carolina*, in eastern Pennsylvania.

This species is Vulnerable and heavily traded in the international pet trade.

Photo by Sean M. Hartzell.

Chelonian Epitaph

Sean M. Hartzell

*I trod upon last autumn's leaves,
winter's chill still on the breeze.
Into the swamp, I search for spring,
but still too cold, no frogs yet sing.*

*I look and see a striking sight,
a turtle's shell, protruding, white.
Your carapace, bleached, your upper half,
your memory, your epitaph.*

*I sit and ponder, as I should,
how many seasons you knew this wood?
While somber feelings fill my heart,
I know that this is nature's part.*

*A natural death, so odd it seems,
for turtles should be, a more common theme.
Not in a pot, or on the road,
or taken far away from your abode.*

*And so, I leave your memory here,
and feel renewal, that spring is near.*

Comment (2017). – I received this poem this spring from Sean Hartzell and found it quietly peaceful and eliciting images of visiting a loved one's grave to pay respects and to remember and honor their life. I asked Sean how he had come to write the poem, and he put it this way: "While I was saddened by the find, I took solace in that the turtle had reached adulthood and appeared to have died of natural causes—a fate not always met by chelonians." In fact, for turtles in this day and age to live out their full lives naturally in their native habitats is indeed increasingly difficult. Although this box turtle may have died of natural old age, it is also possible that it died from some unidentified environmental threat, such as possibly an epizootic *Ranavirus* infection, which has been causing increased mortality in box turtle populations in many areas, including Pennsylvania. The turtles in our environments and around the globe are increasingly threatened by numerous stressors, including habitat loss and degradation, unsustainable consumption and exploitation, invasive species, epizootic disease, and genetic pollution. As we monitor their populations and their continuing declines, they become signal indicators for the declining health and adequacy of our remaining natural habitats and their high vulnerability to targeted exploitation.

2017. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 16(1):110.

Composed 2 March 2017 after observing and photographing the carapace of a deceased Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) in a forest/wetland area often visited to observe nature in eastern Pennsylvania.



Adult male Wood Turtle, *Glyptemys insculpta*, from Lunenburg, Worcester County, Massachusetts, USA.

This species is Endangered, with many animals being poached into the international pet trade.

Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Turtle in the Road

Faith Shearin

*It was the spring before we moved again, a list of what
we must do on the refrigerator, when my daughter
and I found a turtle in the road. He was not gentle
or shy, not properly afraid of the cars that swerved*

*around his mistake. I thought I might encourage him
towards safety with a stick but each time I touched
his tail he turned fiercely to show me what he thought
of my prodding. He had a raisin head, the legs of*

*a fat dwarf, the tail of a dinosaur. His shell was a deep
green secret he had kept his whole life. I could not tell
how old he was but his claws suggested years of
reaching. I was afraid to pick him up, afraid of the way*

*he snapped his jaws, but I wanted to help him return
to the woods which watched him with an ancient
detachment. I felt I understood him because I didn't
want to move either; I was tired of going from one place*

*to another: the introductions, the goodbyes. I was sick
of getting ready, of unpacking, of mail sent to places
where I used to live. At last I put my stick away
and left him to decide which direction was best.*

*If I forced him off the road he might return later.
My daughter and I stood awhile, considering him.
He was a traveler from the time of reptiles, a creature
who wore his house like a jacket. I don't know*

*if he survived his afternoon in the road; I am still
thinking of the way his eyes watched me go.
I can't forget his terrible legs, so determined
to take him somewhere, his tail which pointed
behind him at the dark spaces between the trees.*

Comment (2017). – Faith Shearin is a celebrated American poet from North Carolina who has received awards from The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, The May Swenson Award, The Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, The Dogfish Head Poetry Prize, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She is the author of five poetry books: *The Owl Question*, *The Empty House*, *Moving the Piano*, *Telling the Bees*, and *Orpheus, Turning*. Her work also appears in *The Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary American Poets* and *American Life in Poetry*. She wrote this poem after she and her daughter encountered a Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) on a road in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, “a barrier island with a lot of splendid wildlife including wild horses and pelicans.” It mirrors the poem we previously published 2013 in CCB 12(2) by Robert S. Foote of a similar encounter with a Snapping Turtle crossing a road in Vermont. Most of us here in the USA have seen Snapping Turtles crossing roads, especially during the spring and early summer—and all too often they become the unfortunate victims of road mortality. I like this poem in its evocative description of this fierce turtle and the contrast and comparison between its situation on the road and the poet’s personal life—like the turtle, we all sometimes resist moving from place to place, and sometimes resist those who may try to help us get to where we should be going.

2017. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 16(2):255.

First published 2011 in *Moving the Piano*, by Faith Shearin, copyright © Stephen F. Austin State University Press.

Reprinted 7 March 2013 at <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/> and here with permission of the author. Submitted by Thomas E.J. Leuteritz.



Adult Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, swimming rapidly away from our boat in the Arabian Gulf, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. This species is globally Endangered and sought for its delicious meat.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

La Tortuga

Pablo Neruda

<i>La tortuga que anduvo tanto tiempo y tanto vio con sus antiguos ojos,</i>	<i>la tortuga amarilla y plateada, con severos lunares ambarinos y pies de rapiña, la tortuga se quedó aquí durmiendo, y no lo sabe. De tan vieja se fue poniendo dura, dejó de amar las olas y fue rígida como una plancha de planchar. Cerró los ojos que tanto mar, cielo, tiempo y tierra desafiaron, y se durmió entre las otras piedras.</i>
<i>la tortuga que comió aceitunas del más profundo mar, la tortuga que nadó siete siglos y conoció siete mil primaveras, la tortuga blindada contra el calor y el frío, contra los rayos y las olas,</i>	

The Turtle

Pablo Neruda

(Translated by Jodey Bateman)

<i>The turtle who walked so long and saw so much with his ancient eyes,</i>	<i>the yellow turtle plated, with severe amber scales and feet for catching prey, the turtle stopped here to sleep, and didn't know it. So old that he kept getting harder, he quit loving the waves and became rigid like a clothing iron. He closed the eyes which had defied so much sea, sky, time and earth, and went to sleep among the other stones.</i>
<i>the turtle who ate olives from the deepest sea, the turtle who swam for seven centuries and knew seven thousand springtimes, the turtle hooded against the heat and cold, against sunrays and waves,</i>	

Comment (2018). – Pablo Neruda [1904–1973] was a celebrated poet from Chile who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. His birth name was Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, but he was known by his pen name and, later, legal name of Pablo Neruda. He was also a diplomat and politician and was closely involved in high-level Chilean politics. Neruda first became known as a poet when he was only 13 years old, and wrote in a variety of styles, including surrealist poems, historical epics, overtly political manifestos, a prose autobiography, and passionate explicit love poems such as the ones in his collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924). Many of his poems also dealt with nature, animals, and wilderness, such as this one about an ancient sea turtle. Neruda was one of the world's most gifted and celebrated poets and we are pleased to reprint his wonderful turtle poem here. May it serve to help inspire some other budding turtle poets out there.

2018. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 17(1):134.

First published 1961 in *Las Piedras de Chile* [The Stones of Chile], by Pablo Neruda. Publisher: Losada, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Translation by Jodey Bateman posted online at https://motherbird.com/the_turtle.html and at <https://spanishpoems.blogspot.com/2005/05/pablo-neruda-turtle.html>. Submitted by Thomas E.J. Leuteritz.



Russell A. Mittermeier (*right*) and Anders Rhodin (*left*) with a wild Plowshare Tortoise, *Astrochelys yniphora*, at Cap Sada, Baly Bay National Park, Madagascar, 2008.
Photo courtesy of Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

In Honor of Russell A. Mittermeier on Receiving the Behler Turtle Conservation Award

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*Thank you Russ, my dear old friend
for all that you are, and all that you do
and for all the inspiration you always extend*

*For fifty years now our friendship has grown
beginning at Dartmouth and our Amazon days
with primates and turtles guiding our way*

*With Tarzan in your heart and jungle in your soul
you've inspired us all to follow our dreams
and always to nurture our love of the wild*

*From the MCZ to CI, and your leadership role
describing new turtles, and forging an alliance
while sharing a vision, our strong common goal*

*Leader among leaders, and hero for the planet
extraordinary creator of protected wild places
conservation rock star and champion of species
hotspots, megadiversity, and wilderness areas*

*There from the start, setting the stage
founding our Specialist Group, forming the base
then focusing your efforts on growing the rest
helping to create the TSA, TCF, and MBZ
joining forces with the TC and then GWC*

*We honor you now with the Behler Award
a fitting prelude to the great Indy Prize
we honor you now, my dear old friend
for all that you are, and all that you do
and for all the inspiration you always extend.*

Comment (2018). – I wrote this poem to honor my longtime best old friend and colleague, Russ Mittermeier, on the occasion of him receiving the Behler Turtle Conservation Award, just ahead of also being awarded the prestigious Indianapolis Prize. Russ and I began our friendship in 1968 at Dartmouth College as classmates with dorm rooms across from each other, and traveled together through Central and South America in 1971 after graduation, exploring the Amazon and developing our dreams of studying primates and turtles. We worked together first at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), from where Russ headed off briefly to World Wildlife Fund-US and then became President at Conservation International (CI) for 25 years. He helped create our IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and was instrumental in also helping to found the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), and the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZ), eventually also joining the board of the Turtle Conservancy (TC) and finally a new staff position at Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC). In all these endeavors and organizations he and I worked well together for the benefit of turtles and their preservation and protection. More than just a true and close friend, Russ has also been a professional colleague, frequent co-author on turtle papers, conservation mentor, guide, and inspiration, and always helped facilitate my own interests in turtles, despite my heading off on a primary career in medicine and orthopedic surgery. He kept me connected and helped foster my second parallel career in turtle research and conservation, and for that I will always be eternally grateful. He has also been like family, serving as Godfather for my son Michael and Best Man when I married Carol Conroy. He has been one of the five most important mentors in my life, including my Dad, Johannes, Ernest Williams at the MCZ, Peter Pritchard, and John Behler. I thank him for all he has done for me and for turtles and global conservation in general. He is a true Hero for the Planet.

2018. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 17(2):320.

Composed in Arlington, Vermont, 10 August 2018. Read at the Behler Turtle Conservation Award Ceremony, Fort Worth, Texas, 15 August 2018.



Ornate Box Turtle, *Terrapene ornata ornata*, from Barton County, Kansas, USA.
Photo by Jeffrey E. Dawson.

An Ancient Box Turtle Emerges in Spring

(for Bill Belzer)

Benjamin K. Atkinson

*He leaves behind deep winter sleep,
stretches far as the horizon allows,
cracks open his eyes and sees light
for the first time in half a year.*

*Warmth begins to thaw age-weathered skin.
He takes in sweet scents of spring:
dank earthen mossy smells of ripe soil
blooms of Trillium – first wildflowers.*

*Skunk cabbage, too, unfurls early.
Mayapples form a canopy like tiny palm trees,
beeches sprouting, sheltered by great survivors;
dappled sunlight dances on a living forest floor.*

*Birdsongs and spring showers return,
and something feels familiar.
His blood begins to flow
as brooks grow swifter.*

*And now, as scents overwhelm
breezes caress, and soft sprinkles
of dew and rain wash over his shell,
he yawns, blinks, finds focus.*

*He may take days to fully emerge,
crawling out of this musty womb
to march through foggy mornings
as he did before returning to the earth
and burying himself alive.*

*And now he stretches again; aged bones creak
as he pushes up on yellow-orange front legs
that haven't ambled the ground since leaves
turned red as his eyes.*

*His consciousness slowly floods
with days of many years before,
and he knows – remembers where he is
and what is happening.*

*Logs and oaks have sheltered for decades.
Bees whirl about when he sets off to forage.
His hibernaculum is like the egg
from which he first broke free.*

*For two seasons' time he scarcely breathed.
His heart barely beat and he heard no sound.
He was dead to the surface, and now – he eases
into the spring of a new millennium that means
nothing to the age-old forest.*

*And each time these days seem strange at first.
Each year he takes the change
slower than the last. Soaking in
the damp earth of morning mist
and tasting first fruits of spring.*

He has risen again.

Comment (2019). – Ben Atkinson wrote this poem in honor of his longtime mentor, William R. Belzer [1943–2016]. Bill Belzer was a biology professor at Clarion University who studied and protected Eastern Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) in northwestern Pennsylvania. He founded the Eastern Box Turtle Conservation Trust (EBTCT; www.ebtct.org) which currently functions under the nonprofit financial umbrella of Chelonian Research Foundation. In the spring of 2000, Ben began his first real turtle work under Bill Belzer, who tasked him with checking on his study turtles emerging from hibernation. He spent an hour or more simply sitting with the first box turtle he'd ever observed undertaking this annual ritual of reawakening, following a long western Pennsylvania winter. Bill was an amazing, albeit somewhat reclusive human being, who sported a long flowing beard. His research on box turtles continues through EBTCT, now under the direction of Sue Seibert, with Ben and myself and others serving as advisory board members.

2019. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 18(1):121.

Composed in 2000, revised in 2001, 2006, and 2018.

Earlier versions published 2001 and 2006 in *Facets*, the Butler County Community College literary magazine.



Adult female Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, nesting at the Hildene Lincoln Family Home Estate, Manchester, Vermont, USA.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin, *Chelonian Research Foundation*.

Turtle

Mary Oliver

*Now I see it—
it nudges with its bulldog head
the slippery stems of the lilies, making them tremble;
and now it noses along in the wake of the little brown teal*

*who is leading her soft children
from one side of the pond to the other; she keeps
close to the edge
and they follow closely, the good children—*

*the tender children,
the sweet children, dangling their pretty feet
into the darkness.
And now will come—I can count on it—the murky splash,*

*the certain victory
of that pink and gassy mouth, and the frantic
circling of the hen while the rest of the chicks
flare away over the water and into the reeds, and my heart*

*will be most mournful
on their account. But, listen,
what's important?
Nothing's important*

*except that the great and cruel mystery of the world,
of which this is a part,
not to be denied. Once,
I happened to see, on a city street, in summer,*

*a dusty, fouled turtle plodded along—
a snapper—
broken out I suppose from some backyard cage—
and I knew what I had to do—*

*I looked it right in the eyes, and I caught it—
I put it, like a small mountain range,
into a knapsack, and I took it out
of the city, and I let it*

*down into the dark pond, into
the cool water,
and the light of the lilies,
to live.*

Comment (2019). – Mary Oliver (1935–2019) was a prominent American poet who won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. She studied at Ohio State University and Vassar College, and worked for several years at the estate of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Her first collection of poems was published in 1963 and her fifth, *American Primitive*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1984. From 1991 to 2001 she held a Chair for Distinguished Teaching at Bennington College, Vermont, close to where I live now. She won the Christopher Award and the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award for House of Light in 1990, and the National Book Award for *New and Selected Poems* in 1992. She was influenced by Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, and is known for her clear and poignant observances of the natural world. Her poetry finds inspiration in nature and life, and she describes the sense of wonder and purpose it instilled in her: “When it’s over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. When it’s over, I don’t want to wonder if I have made of my life something particular, and real. I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument. I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.” (from *When Death Comes* in *New and Selected Poems*).

This poem, *Turtle*, conveys the life and death reality of nature as she encounters two separate snapping turtles (near her home in Provincetown on Cape Cod in Massachusetts) and movingly captures her different emotions and reactions to the two contrasting scenarios. For the second turtle, her purposeful action made a difference in its life, as all of us should always try to do.

2019. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 18(2):284.

Published 1990 in *House of Light* by Mary Oliver (Beacon Press, Boston). Republished 2017 in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (Penguin Press, New York)
Copyright © 1990 by Mary Oliver.



African Spurred Tortoise, *Centrochelys sulcata*, pushing ahead with measured step in Katane, Senegal.
Photo by Tomas Diagne, *African Chelonian Institute*.

A Declaration for Turtles

Anders G.J. Rhodin

*Turtles, persevering, biding their time,
with patient persistence and measured step,
overcoming obstacles, trumping their threats,
as Biden beat Trump, tortoise beats hare*

*For turtles and tortoises, terrapins and kin,
their kind to protect, their future to win,
we craft for them a Declaration of Existence,
a Constitution of values, proclaiming their rights:*

*We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all turtles are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Evolution
with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Survival,
and the pursuit of their Natural Life History.*

*We the People, on behalf of all Turtles,
in Order to form for them a more perfect Existence,
establish Justice, ensure habitat Tranquility,
provide for their common survival,
promote their general Welfare,
and secure the Blessings of Protection
to their kind and their Posterity,
do ordain and establish this
Constitution for the Turtles of the World.*

*For turtles and tortoises, terrapins and kin,
their kind to protect, their future to win,
we declare and ordain their right to existence
and work to promote their continued persistence.*

Comment (2020). — I wrote this poem and declaration after watching Joe Biden give his victory speech after being designated the winner of the presidential election over Donald Trump. The moment was inspirational and I thought about his perseverance and step-by-step low-key balanced approach that had gradually led to ultimate victory—not unlike a tortoise, I thought—and the first stanza was born. When he quoted the Irish poet and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney and his poem about hope and history rhyming, it inspired me to think about some of the similarities between the political process I had been experiencing and watching these past four years and the problems of turtles and their survival and need for recognition and protection. I thought about the universal needs and rights of all peoples to be free, to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I thought about all wild animals (and turtles) also having similar needs and rights to life, survival, and the pursuit of their natural life histories—and our need to protect and promote those rights as far as possible and to continue to work for their existence and persistence. I then thought about creating some kind of a universal declaration reflecting those needs and rights, and given the current political moment, I took further inspiration from history and slightly reworded the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution to craft a Declaration of Existence for turtles in the body of the poem.

In my opinion, we the people have a moral imperative to work to preserve the wonderful biodiversity with which we share this one and only Earth—our mutual home—and our hope is that one day we may achieve success and justice for all threatened life and habitats. In the words of Heaney, as Biden quoted: “History says, don’t hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime the longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme.”

I now hope that the darkness and disrespect of these past four tumultuous and dysfunctional years of Trump’s presidency will turn to light and new possibilities as we transition to Biden’s leadership and a more hopeful and decent future of increased equality and respectful recognition of the needs and rights of all peoples and also that of our shared biodiversity heritage and our increasingly threatened biosphere. May history eventually judge that we helped them all, and our Earth, to not only survive, but also to thrive.

2020. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 19(2):309.
Composed 7–8 November 2020 in Arlington, Vermont
on the occasion of Joseph R. Biden, Jr. being designated President-Elect of the USA.



Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, *Lepidochelys kempii*, nesting at Tamaulipas, Mexico, in the Gulf of Mexico.
Photo by Peter C.H. Pritchard, *Chelonian Research Institute*.

The Revolt of the Turtles

Stephen Dunn

*On gray forgetful mornings like this
sea turtles would gather in the shallow waters
of the Gulf to discuss issues of self-presentation
and related concerns like, If there were a God
would he have a hard shell and a retractable head,
and whether speed on land
was of any importance to a good swimmer.*

*They knew that tourists needed to placate
their children with catchy stories, and amuse
themselves with various cruelties
such as turning turtles over on their backs
and watching their legs wriggle.
So the turtles formed a committee to address*

*How to Live Among People Who Among
Other Atrocities Want to Turn You into Soup.*

*The committee was also charged with wondering
if God would mind a retelling of their lives,
one in which sea turtles
were responsible for all things
right-minded and progressive, and men
and women for poisoning the water.*

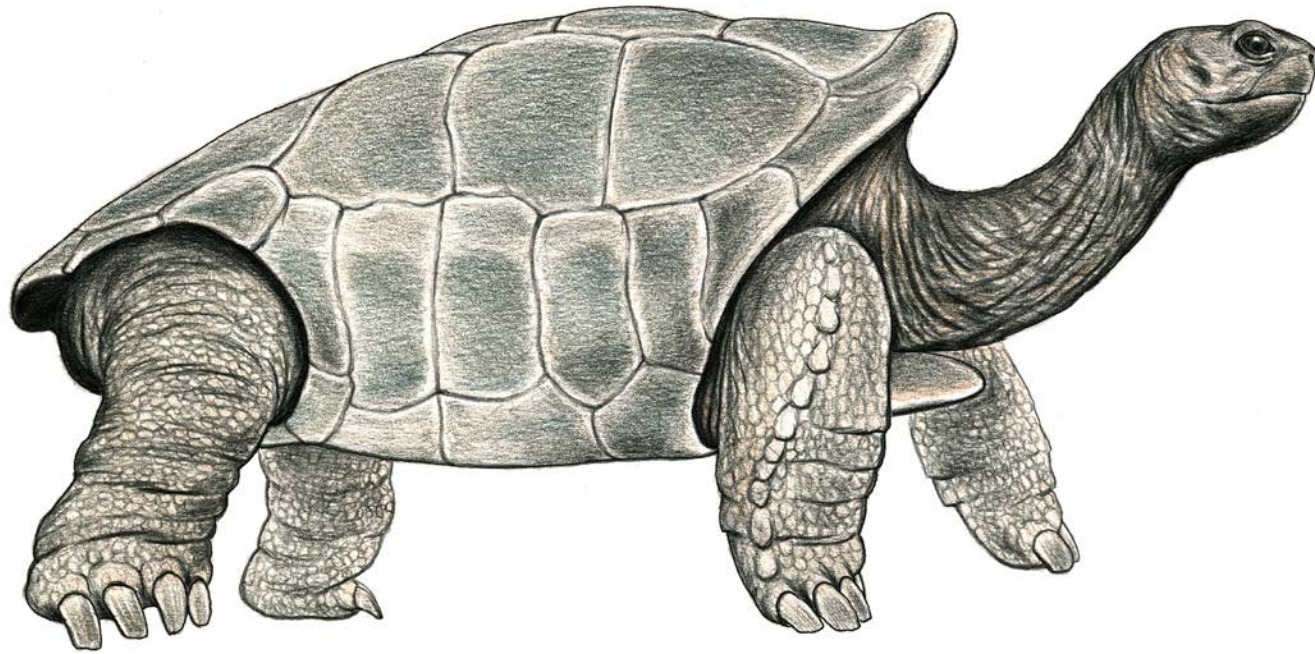
*The oldest sea turtle among them knew
that whoever was in control of the stories
controlled all the shoulds and should-nots.*

*But he wasn't interested in punishment,
only ways in which power could bring about
fairness and decency. And when he finished speaking
in the now-memorable and ever-deepening
waters of the Gulf, all the sea turtles
began to chant Only Fairness, Only Decency.*

Comment (2021). — Stephen Dunn (1939–2021) was a prominent American poet who won the the National Poetry Series Prize in 1986, the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2000, and the Pushcart Prize for poetry in 2016 for this poem, *The Revolt of the Turtles*. He was a distinguished professor of creative writing at Richard Stockton College, New Jersey, and lived in Maryland.

I interpret this poem as a metaphor for our current ongoing political environment in the USA, continuing the theme from the last poem we published, my own *A Declaration for Turtles*. I wrote that poem when I was inspired by Joe Biden being named President-Elect. As I write this comment, Biden has now been President for about four months, and Democrats and progressive Americans, like the sea turtles in this poem inspired by the words of their leader, are calling out for Fairness and Decency as they follow their vision and mission to form a more perfect union and the need to recognize the rights of minorities and marginalized members of society and to promote equity and equality for all. The thought of turtles forming a committee to address the atrocities directed against their rights to survival elicits comparisons to Black Lives Matter and other movements aimed at improving social justice and human rights. May they all succeed and our world become a more Fair and Decent place for all of us to pursue our own visions of Happiness without harming or disadvantaging others, including the wealth of biodiversity that enriches all of us and our Earth.

2021. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 20(1):149.
Published 2016 in *Whereas: Poems* by Stephen Dunn (W.W. Norton & Co., New York).
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Arnold's Giant Tortoise, *Aldabrachelys gigantea arnoldi*, from the Seychelles Islands, Indian Ocean.
Drawing by Stephen D. Nash.



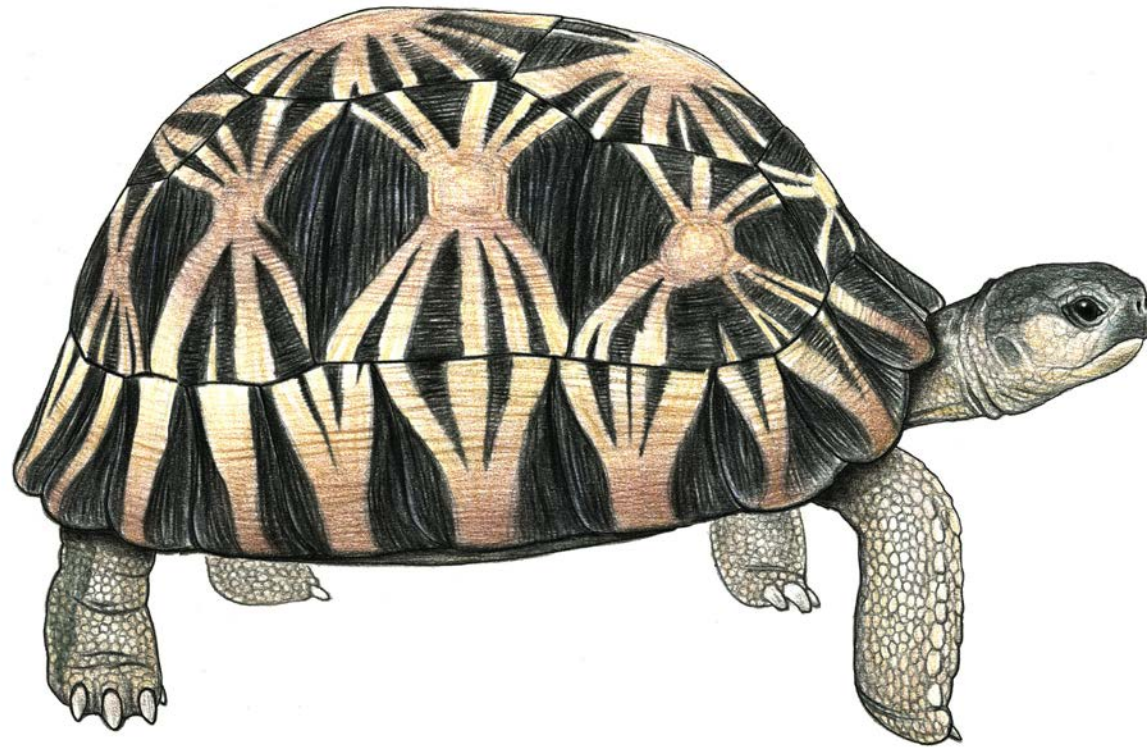
Chelonian Research Foundation (www.chelonian.org)

Chelonian Research Foundation (CRF) was founded in 1992 by Anders G.J. Rhodin and is currently based in Arlington, Vermont. The mission of CRF is the production, publication, and support of worldwide turtle and tortoise research, with an emphasis on the scientific basis of chelonian diversity and conservation biology. CRF has published the peer-reviewed professional turtle journal *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* (CCB) since 1993 (distributed by Allen Press since 2006) as well as the book-length *Chelonian Research Monographs* (CRM) series since 1996. The monograph series includes the ongoing comprehensive publication project on *Conservation Biology of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises* compiled in association with the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG) since 2008, as well as its associated checklist authored by the Turtle Taxonomy Working Group: *Turtles of the World: An Annotated Checklist and Atlas*. In 2017, CRF joined forces with the Turtle Conservancy to co-publish both CCB and CRM. For a long time CRF provided annual support of turtle research and conservation through its Linnaeus Fund, and still provides support of various turtle conservation initiatives, including the African Chelonian Institute in Senegal, the Student Presentation Awards at the TSA/TFTSG Annual Symposium, and the annual Behler Turtle Conservation Award. CRF is an IRS-designated 501(c)(3) nonprofit private operating foundation and serves as a financial umbrella organization for the TFTSG, the Turtle Conservation Fund, and the Eastern Box Turtle Conservation Trust. CRF has also recently launched two endowment funds: the Justin Congdon and Nancy Dickson Research Fund (the Turtle Ecology Fund) and the Turtle Taxonomy Fund.



Turtle Conservancy (www.turtleconservancy.org)

The Turtle Conservancy (TC) protects turtles and tortoises and their ecosystems through focused land acquisition and stewardship, captive assurance colonies, promotion of science and research, education and increased awareness, and illegal trade suppression. It has purchased and protected around 53,000 acres of critical habitat, including 43,540 acres in Mexico for the Bolson Tortoise (*Gopherus flavomarginatus*), 1,000 acres also in Mexico for Goode's Thornscrub Tortoise (*Gopherus evgoodei*), and 1,000 acres in South Africa for the Geometric Tortoise (*Psammobates geometricus*). Further, it has helped to outright purchase 26 acres and protect 7,363 acres for the Palawan Forest Turtle (*Siebenrockiella leytensis*) in the Philippines. The TC's captive breeding program in Ojai, California promotes restoration of natural populations by operating an AZA-accredited facility solely devoted to turtles and tortoises. There it has bred 25 critically endangered species. It works to monitor and prevent trade that threatens many species by partnering with TRAFFIC Southeast Asia and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and also cares for confiscated animals from around the world. The TC's efforts at outreach and global awareness have reached millions of people through television, social media, and its magazine *The Tortoise*. Additionally, the TC supports science for conservation by co-publishing the journals *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* and *Chelonian Research Monographs* with Chelonian Research Foundation and by undertaking field and husbandry research. Recently, the TC has acquired and incorporated the very large scientific turtle collection of Dr. Peter C.H. Pritchard from Chelonian Research Institute and will make it available for continued professional research use. The TC was co-founded by Eric V. Goode in 2005 and is a 501(c)(3) public charity based in Ojai, California.



Adult Radiated Tortoise or Sokake, *Astrochelys radiata*, from southern Madagascar.
Drawing by Stephen D. Nash.



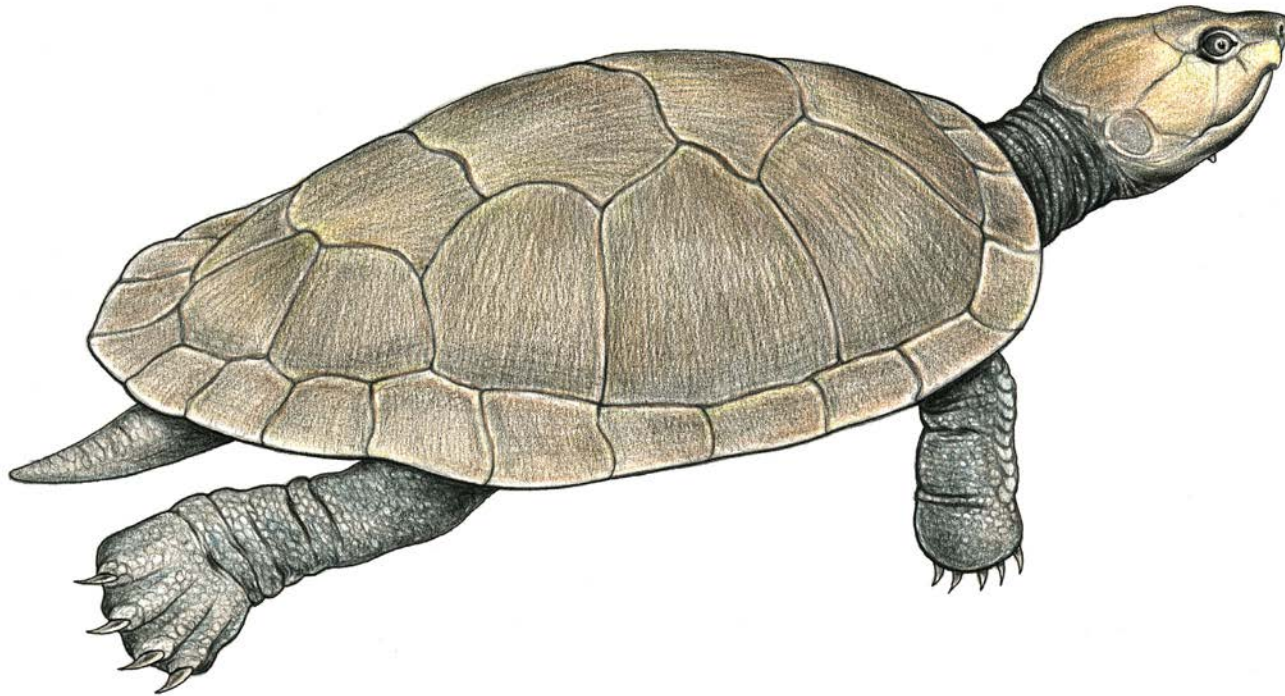
Photo by Russell A. Mittermeier.

ANDERS G.J. RHODIN is an orthopedic surgeon as well as a turtle researcher and conservationist. Born in Sweden, he immigrated to the USA in 1958, received a B.A. from Dartmouth in 1971, an M.D. from the University of Michigan in 1977, did orthopedic surgical residency training at Yale, and was in private medical practice in Massachusetts from 1982 to 2019. He is now retired from medicine and lives in Vermont with his wife, Carol Conroy. He has been doing research on turtles since 1972, initially at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, and currently has nearly 300 publications. He has described six new species of turtles, including three with Russ Mittermeier. He is the Founder and Director of Chelonian Research Foundation, a philanthropic nonprofit organization established in 1992 for the production, publication, and support of worldwide turtle and tortoise research. He is Founding Editor and Publisher of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal devoted exclusively to turtles and tortoises inaugurated in 1993, and *Chelonian Research Monographs*, a book-length series focused on turtle and tortoise research and conservation established in 1996. Since 2017, both of these publications are co-published with the Turtle Conservancy. Anders was Co-Chair or Chair of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG) from 2000 to 2012, and is currently Executive Vice Chair. In 2012 he received the Sir Peter Scott Award for Conservation Merit from the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Behler Turtle Conservation Award from the Turtle Survival Alliance and the TFTSG. He serves as Chairman of the Board of Turtle Conservancy, is Founding Co-Chair of the Turtle Conservation Fund, and a Founding Board Member of the Turtle Survival Alliance and the African Aquatic Conservation Fund. His favorite poet is New England's Robert Frost and his favorite poem, Frost's *The Tuft of Flowers*.



Photo by Peter Paul van Dijk.

ERIC V. GOODE is a well-known hotelier in New York City and also the Co-Founder and President/CEO of Turtle Conservancy, a global conservation organization whose mission is to preserve and protect natural ecosystems, focusing on turtles and tortoises and other wildlife and their habitats. With the initial help and inspiration of his good friend, John Behler from the Bronx Zoo, Eric in 2005 created the Behler Chelonian Conservation Center and retreat in Ojai, California, an AZA-accredited captive-breeding assurance colony for endangered turtles and tortoises. Eric is also Publisher and Co-Editor of *The Tortoise* magazine, a high-end conservation publication of the Turtle Conservancy. He also created the Turtle Ball, a fundraising event in New York that brings together artists, celebrities, philanthropists, and conservationists for a festive evening that shines a light on the global turtle extinction crisis. Among other accomplishments, Eric and the Turtle Conservancy, in conjunction with other conservation organizations, have purchased and established a large nature reserve in South Africa dedicated to the protection of the Geometric Tortoise. In addition, he has organized and helped create support for the purchase of a Nature Preserve for the protection of the Sinaloan Thornscrub Tortoise in Mexico, which was named after him (*Gopherus evgoodei*) in recognition of his passion for the smaller forgotten creatures on the planet. More recently, the Turtle Conservancy has secured two large tracts of protected habitat for the Bolson Tortoise in Mexico, a testament to Eric's dedication to habitat protection for endangered tortoises and his amazing personal ability to energize and mobilize support for turtle conservation from previously untapped sources. Eric is currently a board member of Chelonian Research Institute and the Turtle Conservation Fund and on the advisory councils of Rainforest Trust and Global Wildlife Conservation, and is a member of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG). He received the Behler Turtle Conservation Award from the Turtle Survival Alliance and the TFTSG in 2016.



Madagascan Big-headed Turtle or Rere, *Erymnochelys madagascariensis*, from northern Madagascar.
Drawing by Stephen D. Nash.

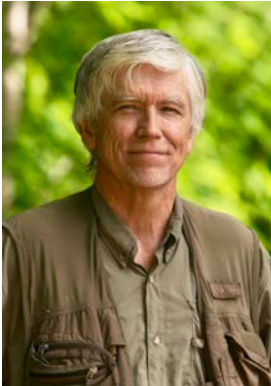


Photo by Cristina G. Mittermeier.

RUSSELL A. MITTERMEIER has been an enthusiastic herpetologist since childhood, with a particular interest in turtles. As an undergraduate at Dartmouth (where he and Anders met and formed a life-long friendship) and at graduate school at Harvard (Ph.D.), he pursued work on turtles and primates and carried out field work around the world. In 1989, Russ became President of Conservation International, a position that he held for 25 years, switching to Executive Vice Chair in 2014. At CI, he was the key figure in adapting Norman Myers' Biodiversity Hotspots concept as a core strategy for that organization for the next two decades, with hugely successful fundraising results. Russ also created the concepts of Megadiversity Countries and High Biodiversity Wilderness Areas as additional strategies for priority-setting, and also worked with several colleagues to adapt these and Hotspots for turtle priority-setting as well. In addition, Russ has had a long history with IUCN. He has served as Chair of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group since 1977, and in 1979 helped create the IUCN Freshwater Chelonian Specialist Group, inaugurated in 1981. He served as that new group's first Vice Chair and has been on the Executive Committee of the combined IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG) ever since, as well as a long-time and current Board member of Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), Turtle Conservancy, Turtle Conservation Fund, and Chelonian Research Foundation. Other IUCN positions include the Steering Committee of the Species Survival Commission since 1982, the IUCN Council from 2004 to 2012, and an IUCN Vice President from 2008 to 2012. In 2017 Russ moved to Global Wildlife Conservation (since rebranded as Re:wild) as its Chief Conservation Officer. He has been involved in the description of 20 new species (3 turtles and 17 primates), has had 8 named after him (two lemurs, one saki monkey, three frogs, a lizard, and an ant – but no turtles yet). His work has been recognized by many different organizations, universities, and countries. He was named a "Hero for the Planet" by Time Magazine in 1998, and has received nearly two dozen awards, including the Gold Medal of the San Diego Zoological Society (1987), the Order of the Golden Ark from Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (1995), the National Order of the Southern Cross from the President of Brazil (1997), the Grand Sash and Order of the Yellow Star from the President of Suriname (1998), the Sir Peter Scott Award for Conservation Merit from the IUCN (2006), the Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Centennial Medal (2017), the Behler Turtle Conservation Award from the TFTSG and TSA (2018), and the highly prestigious Indianapolis Prize for his leadership in global conservation efforts (2018).

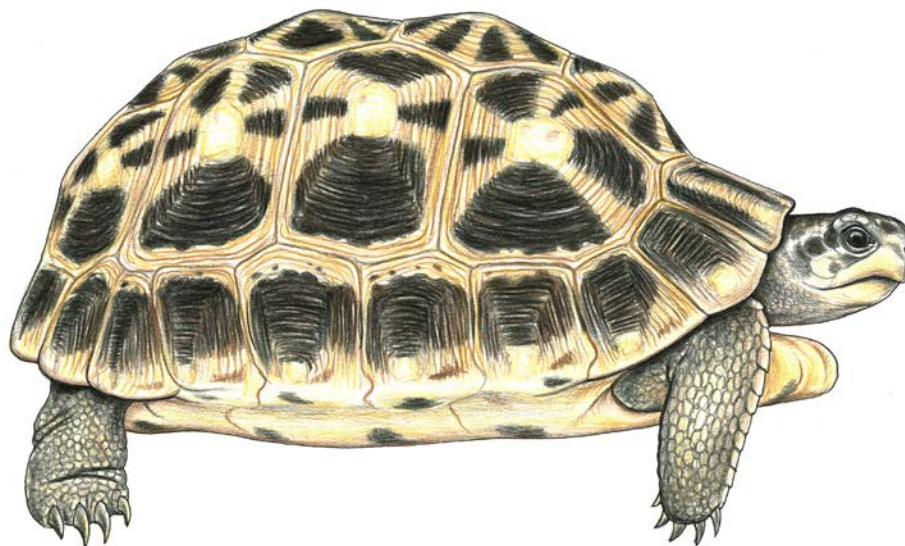


Photo by Marilyn Goode.

JULIAN SANDS is an English actor known for his starring roles in films such as *The Killing Fields*, *A Room with a View*, *Warlock*, *Arachnophobia*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and many others. In 2011, he appeared onstage at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in a solo performance of *A Celebration of Harold Pinter*, directed by John Malkovich. He was nominated for "Outstanding Solo Performance" for the 58th Annual Drama Desk Awards in 2013 following its New York run. He has an abiding love of nature and adventure travel and keeps several tortoises at his home in Los Angeles, California. He is active in conservation efforts and has been a valued Board member of the Turtle Conservancy since helping Eric to host a Turtle Ball in New York several years ago. He is also a big fan of Harold Pinter and his poetry and has been a life-long poetry enthusiast. He is currently touring *Keats*, *Shelley*, *Ghosts and Lovers*, and it is his ardent hope that Tortoises and Turtles do not join the Ghosts of the title.

PHOTOGRAPHERS AND ILLUSTRATORS

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Madagascan Spider Tortoise, *Pyxis arachnoides*, from southwestern Madagascar.
Drawing by Stephen D. Nash.



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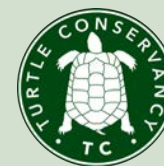
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Tortoises in the Mist:

Turtle Poetry for Conservationists



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